

“Certainly the Proper Business of Woman”: Household and Estate Management  
Techniques of Eighteenth-Century French Noblewomen

BY

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## INTRODUCTION

This project explores the legal, economic, and social aspects of household and estate management in eighteenth-century France. It investigates two paradoxes surrounding noblewomen and household management. The first involves society's view of women's appropriate social, economic, and legal activities. For centuries, philosophers had debated the question of women and their places in society. This debate entered into Enlightenment-era discourses during the eighteenth century, which often concluded that women's ideal roles in these spheres should be minimal or non-existent. And yet, evidence proves that women exercised significant influence in these areas through their roles as household and estate managers. Noblewomen mediated local disputes, as was custom for provincial nobility. The financial necessities of provincial estate management forced women to contribute to regional and national economies through participation in credit networks. Dwindling finances necessitated that women borrow on credit to pay expenses; women also acted as lenders, especially if they married into influential families. As impoverishment and mounting debt began to erode the reputation of the shrinking provincial nobility, noblewomen concerned themselves with maintaining the honor of their families through keeping their legal problems private and securing new lines of credit.

The second paradox centers on women's preparation for household and estate management. While society expected elite women to become managers, and their families actively sought alliances with noble families, the educational opportunities available to girls did not adequately prepare them for their responsibilities as adults. Legal and financial knowledge, as well as the social skills necessary for managing

household staff, did not comprise a girl's education in eighteenth-century France.

Women coped with this discrepancy by forming relationships with notaries, lawyers, or exceptionally capable household employees, who served as close advisors and financial intermediaries who interpreted the complex social economic landscape of eighteenth-century France. These advisors possessed the skills noblewomen lacked, as well as a body of local knowledge indispensable to women unaccustomed to life on a provincial estate.

Because many provincial noblemen spent time in Paris or Versailles looking for income and favors, the interaction between women and their advisors was unregulated by a familial male authority. Women shared private family information with advisors and relied on them to assist with decision-making. In these situations, women circumvented social norms and forged uniquely intimate and unmediated relationships with men of a different social class. Through an analysis of correspondence between women and their advisors, as well as legal and notarial documents related to household and estate management, I demonstrate the crucial role advisors played in assisting women locate and operate within credit networks. Advisors became important agents of household construction, as women relied on their advice in hiring household staff and in interacting with employees. This study concludes that provincial noblewomen exercised important influence in the economic, legal, and social spheres of eighteenth century France despite the disadvantages they possessed.

Current historiography on eighteenth-century French nobility tends to normalize the experiences of men, implying that either women's experiences conformed to those of their male counterparts, or that exploring the lives of noblewomen does not reveal much

about society. While this implication may not be intentional, scholarship certainly has overlooked how French noblewomen contributed to society and the economy by carrying out their tasks as household and estate managers. Through their involvement in complicated creditor and debtor networks, women contributed to the economy of the Old Regime. Recent scholarship has begun to investigate the roles of elite European women as creditors, debtors, and even investors. Due to their unique relationships with their advisors, noblewomen redefined appropriate social roles, gendered relationships, and modes of household construction.

### **Sources**

This study began with an exploration of notarial archives, specifically the archive housed in the Spencer Research Library at the University of Kansas of the Provençal lawyer and notary Gaspard Gaufridy.<sup>1</sup> The unique nature of that collection made the following project possible. While historians have long mined French notarial archives for social, legal, and economic information, collections from notaries typically contain only compilations of the official documents they registered, such as marriage contracts, wills, financial transfers, etc. These documents in and of themselves reveal much, and because notaries kept copies of all registered documents to pass on to their successors, notarial archives tend to be relatively organized and complete, possessing a sense of chronology and continuity. What most notarial archives do not contain, however, is a

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<sup>1</sup> The provenance of the Gaufridy Collection is as follows: The Gaufridy Collection was purchased by the Spencer Research Library at the University of Kansas on 17 February, 1964, from Joseph Rubinstein, then a bookseller in Tucson. He had purchased it some years before from Jean Hugues, bookseller, 1 rue de Furstenberg, Paris. Hugues had acquired it from an unnamed member of the Sade family.

sense of the interactions that went on between notary and client before, during, and after the process of drawing up legal documents and financial transactions. In order to overcome this and to understand more about the notary, historian Claire Dolan has undertaken close readings of notarial documents to demonstrate where the notary's own opinions are reflected in his official documentation.<sup>2</sup> This proved the notary did not function as a mere scribe, but that he helped shape the documents he created, even documents that on the surface seemed to have prescribed formats and left little room for variation.

Still, an important issue remained absent in the study of notaries, and that was an understanding of the interactions with and the roles they played in lives of their clients. The unique characteristic of Gaufridy's archive is that it contains manuscript correspondence from his clients. This collection of letters supplements Gaufridy's work as a notary, lending insight into his relationships with his clients, the services he performed for them, and the reactions his clients had to his work. One of the reasons Gaufridy's client letters have survived can be attributed to the fact that he spent much of his career in the employ of the Sade family. The notoriety of the Marquis de Sade certainly played a role in keeping Gaufridy's client letters intact. However, the overwhelming majority (405 of nearly 600) of the Sade-related letters in Kansas' Gaufridy Collection were authored by Renée-Pélagie de Montreuil, the Marquise de Sade. This initial observation intrigued me, as it would be expected that Donatien Alphonse de Sade, the Marquis, would have had the most correspondence with Gaufridy. Gaufridy helped with household, estate, and legal matters; in addition, Donatien and

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<sup>2</sup> Claire Dolan, *Le Notarie, La Famille, et La Ville: Aix-en-Provence à la fin du XVIIe siècle* (Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 1998).

Gaufridy had been friends since childhood. This brought up the question of why Renée would have had so much interaction with Gaufridy. The content of Renée's letters to Gaufridy, as well as an understanding of the life of the provincial nobility in the eighteenth century, revealed that Renée played a crucial, central role in the maintenance of the Sade households and properties.

For this study, Renée's letters in the Gaufridy Collection are augmented by the significant amount of correspondence pertaining to the Sades housed in French archives, such as the Bastille Papers at the *Bibliothèque Nationale de France* and various municipal and local archives in Provence. Alice Laborde has compiled, edited, and published in printed volumes Sade-related manuscripts.<sup>3</sup> This twenty-seven volume set added immensely to the correspondence in the Gaufridy Collection by providing not just Renée's letters, but the responses of her advisors, as well as direct correspondence among her advisors and family members. Letters from Fage, the Sade's financial administrator, and Ripert, an experienced estate manager and *rentier* of Sade properties, appear in Laborde's volumes. The sources can be pieced together to form a multi-faceted picture of Renée's household management style, her relationships with her staff and family members, and the state of the Sade family's financial affairs.

Because of the notoriety of the Marquis de Sade, the Sade family papers have been kept relatively intact over the years, thus allowing for an unusually complete documentation of their lives. For this reason, Renée emerges as the main character in the story about provincial noblewomen and household and estate management. The embarrassment of sources about Renée, Donatien, and their household make the Sades an

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<sup>3</sup> Alice M. Laborde, *Correspondances du marquis de Sade et de ses proches enrichies de documents, notes et commentaires* (Geneva: Editions Slatkine, 1994), vols. I-XXVII.

attractive case study, as few holes exist in their biographies, timelines, and the primary sources. When the historical record permits, sources pertaining to other noblewomen have been added to this story, either to corroborate the universality of Renée's experiences or to give an alternative picture based on another individual's situation. The sources for these accounts come from the *Archives Privées* in France's *Archives Nationales* and from smaller collections of eighteenth-century manuscripts at Chicago's Newberry Library.

This work, however, overwhelmingly represents a case study, despite the occasional inclusion of non Sade related documentation. The approach of a case study introduces both strengths and weaknesses into the work. The notoriety associated with the Sade family name has ensured that a plethora of sources related to the family has survived to present day. Reconstructing Renée's experiences as a household and financial manager is made easier by the amount of secondary information available on the Sade family, as well as the comprehensive nature of the primary sources surrounding her. Using Renée as a case study means that a richer, more detailed picture can emerge of a female household manager.

A common weakness plaguing case studies, though, is the question of wider applicability. In many ways, Renée's situation was unique. Not all noblewomen lived as much in the public eye as Renée did; however, that usually means that the sources available today to document their lives tend to be less rich. I have, when possible, made likely parallels between Renée's situation and what might have happened to another woman. For instance, not every provincial noblewoman's husband was an infamous sexual deviant; however, Donatien's imprisonments kept him away from home for



extended periods of time. Other noblemen spent significant amounts of time away from home, either in Paris, at Versailles, or on military campaign. In these ways, Renée's unique circumstances can be explained in a way to make them more applicable.

This case study exists as a "pilot study," a way to test the kinds of evidence available on this topic. The rich, detailed sources on Renée made her the logical place to start an investigation of household and estate management techniques of women. Articulating Renée's case lays the groundwork for subsequent studies of sources that may not be as comprehensive as those on the Sade family. The next step for further study would be expand this work, using Renée as just one of many case studies to shed light on the experiences of French women who managed estates and households before the Revolution.

### **Methods and Theories**

Women's manuscript letters represent one important primary source for my research. I analyze their writing not as epistolary literature, which has been a popular way of understanding women's writing, but as a practical mode of communication. I combine historical analysis of these letters with feminist theory, especially that of *l'écriture féminine*, which suggests that letter writing affected a woman's relationship with the letter's recipient. Because women often were poorly educated and thus were awkward writers, writing for women connoted intimacy, as a woman exposed her ignorance in her writing. Noblewomen accustomed to being respected and in charge had to show weaknesses to non-relative men of a lower social class. A study of these letters demonstrates how women tried to define and control their interactions with their

advisors. Letters also give insight into the intimate, private nature of relationships with advisors.

My work not only analyzes the lives and experiences of noblewomen, but those of their advisors as well. The last decade has produced numerous studies of lawyers and notaries during the early modern period and the eighteenth century. My study fits within this framework, as it elucidates the important social and economic roles of these men. I have the added element of Gaufridy's correspondence, which gives a new dimension to the sources that have been available to study notaries. I also investigate the important roles played by other household advisors, as Renée created an entourage of experts to assist her, and she wrote to them as well.

One noticeable characteristic of this study is the consistent referencing of the Marquise de Sade by her first name, Renée. The other noblewomen whose sources appear in this study are references in the same manner, by their first names. Several factors came to bear upon the decision to not refer to the female letter writers in this study by married family names and to instead simply use a first name. Renée's title, the Marquise de Sade, carries with it a great deal of baggage associated with her infamous husband. To avoid these associations, I refrained from using her title or Donatien's, as the title Marquis de Sade is more fraught than that of the Marquise. In addition, using the titles gave an air of formality that did not necessarily exist within the close circle of family and household advisors. Using her first name creates a sense of intimacy as the reader becomes acquainted with Renée. Gaufridy, Fage, and Ripert did not refer to Renée as the Marquise de Sade in their letters; when they did refer to her directly, they called her "Madame," which while still formal did not contain her title, or they did not

refer to her by name at all. While the letters between and among Renée and her advisors relied on the more formal “vous” form of the pronoun “you,” this was more of a convention among the noble classes than it was a reflection of emotional distance between the writers. Most often, Renée did not sign the letters she wrote to her advisors. On the few occasions she did, she used a combination of her maiden and married names, signing as “Montreuil de Sade.” The vast majority of her letters, however, simply end without any signature at all, as the recipient would have surely known who sent the missive.

Joan DeJean has discussed the difficulties of identifying female authors and letter writers.<sup>4</sup> It was and still remains customary to refer to male writers simply by last name, and tracking down a prominent man’s full name is a relatively simple task. By contrast, female writers become “Madame de” or “Mademoiselle de;” one never refers to a male author as “Monsieur.” Thus, DeJean has noticed that while men are remembered as authors known by their own names, women must always first be women and secondly known by their family name, and that of a husband in the case of a married woman. The persistence of referring to women as “Madame” or “Mademoiselle” has also made finding a woman’s first name difficult, if that name has not already been lost to the historical record. When a first name is available, in the case of a French noblewoman, that name will be a long, compound name, as in Renée’s name of Renée-Pélagie de Montreuil, Marquise de Sade. Thus, it can be difficult to determine how to refer to one with a compound name.

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<sup>4</sup> Joan DeJean, *Tender Geographies: Women and the Origins of The Novel in France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991). For her discussion of identifying and naming female writers, see “Introduction,” pp. 1-16.

For the sake of simplicity, and since this study requires keeping up with many characters, I decided to use the first name in a string of compound names to refer to Renée and the other female letter writers consulted for this study. In order not to jar with the reader and conjure up negative images, I have limited the use of the name Sade and refer to the Marquis by his first name, Donatien. Gaufridy, Fage, and Ripert all signed their letters with only their last names, and they addressed each other in the same way and were addressed in this manner by both Renée and Donatien.

This project relies on two different kinds of written work by women—manuscript letters and published treatises. The women who composed the primary source letters consulted in this project are identified by first name, both to lend a tone of familiarity and because these women are, for the most part, lesser known than those who published philosophical works. On the other hand, biographical and personal information about authors such as Emilie du Châtelet and Louise d'Épinay remains better known and relatively easily accessed. Because these women are treated in a variety of secondary sources on this era, I have stayed within convention and refer to them by their last names. Also, because knowledge of their private, everyday lives is not necessary to this study, a connotation of intimacy that a first name carries is not necessary to apply to these authors. Therefore, the naming of the published female authors consulted for Chapter Two and Chapter Five is more traditional. This identification was undertaken, however, while conscious of the difficulties associated with naming female writers and of the inequalities that exist between references to men and references to women who authored written works of various kinds.

## **Chapter Outline**

**Chapter One** contains the necessary biographical information on the Sades to contextualize their story. It explores the lack of scholarly literature on the lives of French noblemen during this period. It analyzes the social and economic situations faced by the provincial nobility during the last century of the Old Regime and describes in detail the Sade lifestyle and the Sade property of La Coste, the main setting for Renée's story of household and estate management.

**Chapter Two** explores the educational opportunities available to girls in the eighteenth century, as well as the socially-perceived purposes of a girl's education. This analysis deals with the second paradox of household and estate management mentioned above. Despite the fact that women were expected to take on managerial roles upon marriage, society did not adequately prepare women for these roles. There did not seem to be a recognition that household and estate management relied upon complicated written, verbal, mathematical, and legal knowledge, and these types of knowledge were seen as inappropriate for girls and women. Thus, when many women assumed responsibility for households, they did not possess the necessary skills to manage successfully on their own. This accounts for the importance of advisors, such as lawyers and notaries, in the lives of women.

**Chapter Three** and **Chapter Four** take a detailed look at Renée's experiences as the household and estate manager of La Coste, Donatien's favorite family property. The third chapter describes Renée as a household manager. It demonstrates how, with relatively little knowledge about how to undertake her duties, she enlisted her advisors, who included the notary/lawyer Gaufridy, the Sade's personal lawyer Fage, and the

experienced Sade household manager Ripert, to assist her. In the process, then, her advisors became agents of household construction and maintenance, along with Renée. The fourth chapter details the financial responsibilities borne by Renée when she assumed responsibility for the Sade households and properties. She relied on the contacts and expertise of her team of advisors to help her secure the lines of credit that became necessary to the functioning of her household. This chapter charts the financial contributions of women to the economy through their roles as household and estate managers.

**Chapter Five** investigates the significance of the fact that Renée's interactions with her advisors took place through the medium of written correspondence. She spent years sharing private, intimate information with these non-relative men via letters. Even though she relied on her team of advisors for a great deal of assistance, she used her letters not only to ask for help but to assert her authority as the Marquise de Sade, even though she had little to no instruction on how to compose such business-related letters. Finally, the **Conclusion** revisits the issue of the case study and reflects upon Renée's "success" as a household and estate manager.

**CHAPTER ONE**  
**“A Woman’s Province”: Noble Status, Reputation, and Household Management on  
Eighteenth-Century French Provincial Estates**

May 1, 1763, represented an important day in the life of young Renée-Pélagie de Montreuil. On that day, a ceremony took place at Versailles during which the King of France personally signed and approved her marriage contract, an arrangement that had been months in the making and would tie her and her family to the distinguished *noblesse d’épée* heritage of the Provincial Sade family. Personal and ceremonial royal recognition and approval of marriage contracts was afforded to a very few; the ceremony of May 1 served as a sign of the influence of both the Sade and Montreuil families. Aside from the royal ceremony, this day was significant to Renée in another, more fundamental way, as it was to be the first meeting she would have with her future husband, Donatien. On that spring morning, both families arrived at court, except for one conspicuously absent party—Donatien. Renée spent the day at Versailles, making introductions and watching the signing of her marriage contract by the king and important royal family members, without her fiancé. By the end of the evening, all parties had returned home, and while her marriage had garnered the highest approval in the kingdom, Renée had still yet to make Donatien’s acquaintance.

Even though the marriage of Renée and Donatien had been arranged and was not a love-match, one would assume that the future couple would at least have had some curiosity about each other, even if one or both of them privately harbored resentment regarding the arrangement. It did not seem, however, that Donatien had any interest in meeting Renée. Renée’s reputed looks and personality probably had a great deal to do with her soon-to-be husband’s lack of interest. The most flattering comment Donatien’s

father could muster after his first meeting with Renée was that she was not ugly.<sup>1</sup>

Renée's mother apologized to Donatien's uncle for Renée's looks, noting that while she has a sweet nature, she lacked the "gifts" of "figure and charm."<sup>2</sup> Part of this is due to the fact that Renée showed little to no interest in cultivating her looks or learning the flirtatious, coquettish ways of women of her social standing. Instead, she behaved notoriously like a tomboy, enjoying physical tasks like chopping wood. She was most comfortable in well-worn clothes and reclaimed shoes. Renée has been described as possessing "masculine ways, a grenadier's demeanor" never having "made no attempt at elegance."<sup>3</sup> A woman of Renée's character held little interest for a man like Donatien, who was drawn to beautiful, cultivated women. And yet, while personal information about Renée made it back to Donatien, he remained a mystery to her up until two days before their wedding.

The next chance Renée had to meet Donatien would be two weeks later, at the notarization of the marriage contract on May 15. In the intervening weeks since the Versailles ceremony, Donatien had not materialized in Paris. So infuriated was Donatien's father that he insisted when Donatien did finally appear, it had better be with several dozen artichokes as a gift, as if vegetables would make up for Donatien's behavior. Renée's first meeting with her mysterious, absent suitor occurred on the morning of May 15, right before the scheduled signing of the marriage contract by the notary, when he arrived bearing artichokes and a sullen mood. Two days later, in the church of Sainte-Marie-Madeleine, Renée and Donatien married. This was the first day

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<sup>1</sup> The Comte de Sade to his sister, in Maurice Lever, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, *Sade: A Biography* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1993), p. 106.

<sup>2</sup> La Présidente to l'abbé de Sade, in Lever, p. 106.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.



of her life-long relationship with Donatien, a relationship that initiated her into an alien world of provincial household and estate management, public scandal, and near financial ruin. The tumultuous, uncertain beginning of Renée's adult life with (and without) her husband turned out to be an appropriate prelude for the rest of her live with (and without) him.

This chapter reviews the existing secondary scholarship on the nobility, noting that comprehensive studies dealing with noblewomen, and specifically their roles as household and estate managers, do not exist for France. This dissertation addresses this dearth of scholarship by a case study of Renée and her household responsibilities. The chapter then evaluates existing scholarship on the Sades, which has focused exclusively on Donatien. A focus on the Marquis is understandable, but the sources that exist surrounding Renée have largely been ignored for what they can reveal about the experiences of female household managers in this period. Finally, the chapter provides important biographical information on the Sades, as well as a discussion of the setting of La Coste, which gives necessary context to the subsequent chapters in this study.

### **The Historical Problem of French Noblewomen**

This study analyzes household and estate management techniques of noble women in eighteenth-century France. The expectation that household duties were the responsibility of women permeated all levels of society in the eighteenth century, from the lowest classes to the nobility. The tasks that constituted household affairs varied widely, and for aristocratic women overseeing large households, the responsibilities encompassed taking care of immediate family, household finances, household

maintenance, a sometimes complicated hierarchy of servants, and, in the case of a provincial noblewoman, arbitrating incidents in immediate towns. Running a household required financial savvy, interpersonal skills, constant awareness, a commanding presence, and the ability to multi-task. Certainly such expectations were daunting, and it would require an indeed rare woman to master all required daily tasks.

Despite the expectation that such duties fell to women, few studies exist that detail the lives of French noblewomen. The historiography on the nobility of Old Regime France is indeed rich and varied, to the point that even listing the “major” works concerning the French nobility would be a monumental task. The most popular lenses through which to view the nobility of early modern and eighteenth-century France have been its relationships to state-building, cultural production, and financial contributions.<sup>4</sup> These lenses have helped elucidate noble mores, education, lifestyles, and political participation. Because of this, the focus of most noble studies have been on noblemen, with the experiences of noblewomen either ignored or assumed to be similar to those of their male counterparts.

While the historiographical treatment of the nobility as a whole has changed dramatically over time, women have not been included in this shift. The French nobility

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<sup>4</sup> For example, see: William Beik, *Absolutism and Society in Seventeenth-Century France: State Power and Provincial Aristocracy in Languedoc* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Guy Chaussinand-Nogaret, trans. William Doyle, *The French Nobility in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Jonathan Dewald, *Aristocratic Experience and the Origins of Modern Culture: France, 1570-1715* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Jonathan Dewald, *The Formation of a Provincial Nobility: The Magistrates of the Parliament of Rouen, 1499-1610* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980); Jonathan Dewald, *Pont-St-Pierre, 1398-1789: Lordship, Community, and Capitalism in Early Modern France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Sharon Kettering, *Patrons, Brokers, and Clients in Seventeenth-Century France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Mark Motley, *Becoming a French Aristocrat: The Education of the Court Nobility, 1580-1715* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).

of the eighteenth century has been viewed through a Marxist lens as a homogenous group who adhered to rigid social divisions and participated in a feudal pact with the royal government to oppress the peasantry and prevent the emergence of a middle class. Revisionist studies that began to appear in the 1970s and 1980s pushed back against Marxism, instead characterizing the nobility as a socially progressive, heterogeneous group whom the crown victimized to the same extent as it did other classes. Recent studies of the nobility since the 1980s have treated the nobility with what has been termed “benign neglect,” eschewing studies of the every day realities of nobility to produce instead political works involving nobility or works focused on non-noble classes.<sup>5</sup> The nobility of the eighteenth century has been especially prone to overshadowing by political events, as the century ended with the Revolution. Guy Chaussinand-Nogaret began his revision of the eighteenth-century nobility in 1979, and for him, the story of the nobility in the eighteenth century is the story of the urban elites in Paris and of the Revolution.

In his 1980 revisionist look at the provincial nobility, Jonathan Dewald began his introduction with a discussion of the surprising lack of solid historical information on the nobility of early modern France.<sup>6</sup> While an emerging interest in non-nobles resulted in archival-based works detailing the middle and working classes of this period, a “paradoxical distribution” of knowledge resulted, as rigorous historical studies of the nobility were not being produced. Compared to what scholars knew about the peasantry, information on nobility remained “circumstantial and picturesque,” “less often based on

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<sup>5</sup> Jay M. Smith, ed., *The French Nobility in the Eighteenth Century: Reassessments and New Approaches* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), Introduction.

<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Dewald, *The Formation of a Provincial Nobility: The Magistrates of the Parliament of Rouen, 1499-1610*.

archival research and sophisticated method,” and “based on literary sources and on a few well-known examples.” While this dearth of information has been somewhat remedied in the intervening years, for instance by Mark Motley and his social and cultural study of the “making” of nobility, Jay Smith’s assertion nearly thirty years after Dewald of a persistence of “benign neglect” holds true, especially for half of the population of the French nobility. As Mita Choudhry has noted regarding eighteenth-century French noblewomen, “for the most part [they have] been subsumed by larger studies that encompass the early modern period, often emphasizing the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, or those that cover a range of early modern women.”<sup>7</sup> The noblewomen for whom detailed studies have been produced have been court women, *salon* women, or well-known literary women. In this way, noblewomen have fallen victim to Dewald’s previous criticism of being known through literary sources, a few well-known examples, and circumstantial evidence.

A comprehensive look at the everyday lives of provincial noblewomen does not exist for France during this period. Similar studies of elite women in Britain have been produced, but equivalent works do not exist for France.<sup>8</sup> Even within larger studies of the nobility as a whole, the experiences of women have been overlooked. In his study of both formal and informal education of nobility, Motley concentrated on boys and noblemen, leaving the preparation of noblewomen to be extrapolated or assumed.

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<sup>7</sup> Mita Choudhry, “Women, Gender, and the Image of Eighteenth-Century Aristocracy,” in Jay M. Smith, ed., p. 170.

<sup>8</sup> For example, Stella Tillyard, *Aristocrats: Caroline, Emily, Louisa, and Sarah Lennox, 1740-1832* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1994) and Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman’s Daughter: Women’s Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).

The difference between the treatment of the aristocratic classes as a whole in Britain and France was noted by Dewald in his introduction to his 1980 book, as he observed no equivalent to Lawrence Stone’s works had been produced for France.

Dewald's study of the provincial nobility dedicated a chapter to the topic of provincial estate administration but never mentioned the role of noblewomen in this endeavor. This study seeks to fill the gap surrounding noblewomen by detailing the lives of provincial noblewomen, and, by extension, showing how noblewomen, too, expressed social and political opinions and contributed to the financial landscape of Old Regime France.

Renée-Pélagie de Montreuil, the Marquise de Sade, represents the main case study for this project. She fits the profile of urban *noblesse de robe* daughter who married into the traditional, landed provincial nobility in order to advance her family's reputation. Her marriage took her to Provence, where she, without proper training, life experience, or formal education, assumed responsibility for a château, a house full of servants, and family properties throughout the region. During her husband's frequent absences, she took sole responsibility for management and financial matters. She did, however, inherit a team of experienced professional advisors, ranging from family members like l'abbé de Sade, to the experienced household manager Ripert, to the notarial and legal experts Fage and Gaufridy. Her interactions with these men reveal how Renée attempted to advance her family while holding together Sade properties and finances. The processes she underwent in her attempts at these undertakings serve as a model for women who operated under similar circumstances. In this way, noblewomen can enter into the historical understanding of the impact of nobility on French society and the French economy towards the end of the Old Regime.

### **Historiography and the Sades**

Not surprisingly, Donatien, the Marquis de Sade, and his immediate family have garnered much attention of biographers, literary scholars, and those interested in the implementation of psychological analyses on historical subjects. A survey of secondary works dealing with the Marquis de Sade and the Sade family in the eighteenth century reveals that the height of Sade study occurred in the 1920s and 30s, and again in the 1950s and 60s. An article entitled “Recent Developments in Research on the Marquis de Sade” was published in an October 1951 issue of *The French Review*. This demonstrates that, despite an interest in family history as a serious mode of scholarly inquiry, as well as the explosion of women’s history and local, cultural studies, scholarship on Sade has remained relatively static. The copious amount of source material available has not been mined for what it could potentially reveal about the daily life of the provincial nobility and noblewomen in particular, as well as the social and political values of this class. The interest generated in the last fifteen years in lawyers and notaries has not engaged with Sade scholarship and Sade related primary sources even though the Sades surrounded themselves with lawyers and notaries.

Most articles dealing with Sade appear in literary, not historical, journals, such as *Comparative Literature*, *Modern Language Notes*, *Poetics Today*, *The French Review*, and *French Forum*. Authors tend to use Sade as a vehicle through which to focus on theatre, the novel, or views and depictions of the human body. Articles such as “Ideas on the Novel: From Madame de Lafayette to Marquis de Sade” and “Sade, Vanille, et Manille: Urology and the Body of the Text” are typical of the subject matter surrounding Sade.<sup>9</sup> In most of these cases, Sade and his writings are linked together, and scholars

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<sup>9</sup> Appearing in *The French Review* and *French Forum*, respectively.

imply that Sade could (and should) be understood by analyzing his theatrical plays and pornographic texts.

Several biographies of Sade exist in book form. Again, many of these biographies appeared during the boom times for Sade scholarship, and are thus 50 or 70 years old. In the past few years, though, (1998 and 1999), three new biographies of the Marquis were published. In 2000, a review article compared these three books: *Sade: A Biographical Essay* by Laurence L. Bongie; *At Home with the Marquis de Sade* by Francine du Plessix Gray; and *The Marquis de Sade: A Life* by Neil Schaeffer.<sup>10</sup> Bongie and Schaeffer, both scholars of literature, used literary critique and psychology to paint a picture of the Marquis. The review criticizes Schaeffer's work for his implication that Sade's writings are semi-biographical glimpses into his psyche. While acknowledged scholarly virtues of Bongie's book exist, his book focuses heavily on the Marquis' formative childhood and adolescent years, the time before he was married and had children. Ripert's name does not exist in the index of Bongie's biography. Ripert was an important member of the Sade network; however, most of his work was related to Renée, as she corresponded with him. Both Fage and Gaufridy, who wrote frequently to both Renée and Donatien, do appear in Bongie's index. Donatien did not interact very often with Ripert, but he was one of Renée's most constant contacts. The absence of Ripert from the index suggests that Renée's life and experiences did not factor into Bongie's account. As biographies of Donatien, these works naturally focus on his life and artistic productions. However, the themes they explore and the sources they use did not change dramatically from the older works of previous generations.

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<sup>10</sup> Beatrice Fink, "The Divine Down to Earth: Three Recent Sade Biographies," in *Eighteenth Century Life*, 24 (Spring, 2000), 106-110.

Works in French, such as Alice M. Laborde's *Le Mariage du Marquis de Sade*, which, by virtue of its title, suggests an emphasis on his marriage and family life, seem to instead emphasize the Comte de Sade's (Donatien's father's) impact on the young Marquis. One review of Laborde's book claims that, while the "title is promising, it does not add much to what we already knew" about the Marquis.<sup>11</sup> Maurice Lever's 1993 biography, *Donatien Alphonse Francois, Marquis de Sade* has set the standard for Sade biography (recent biographers Bongie, Schaeffer, and Plessix Gray credit him profusely for influencing their works), with its emphasis on the Marquis himself and its desire to explain the psychological processes that dominated his life.<sup>12</sup> There seems to be a focus on trying to figure out what was wrong with Donatien and what was wrong with Renée, as she remained married to him for many years despite his notorious reputation and actions.

Francine du Plessix Gray, a popular non-academic writer, produced *At Home with the Marquis de Sade*, a best-seller and Pulitzer Prize finalist that attempts to tell the story of the Marquis at home, mostly his château La Coste, but also through his "travels," imprisonments, and banishments. Plessix Gray emphasized his relationship with women, especially the two women who had the most influence in his life—his wife, Renée and his vivacious and meddling mother-in-law, known as La Présidente. Using the vast correspondence that exists from and about these women, this biography comes closer to being the history of a family, rather than the explanation of the life and works of one man. In a 1999 *New York Review of Books* review, Robert Darnton, a well-known French

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<sup>11</sup> Colette Michael, review of *Le Mariage du Marquis de Sade* in *The French Review*, Vol. 164, No. 4 (Mar., 1991), pp. 690-691.

<sup>12</sup> Maurice Lever, trans. Arthur Goldhammer.



historian, found several factual errors in Plessix Gray's book, demonstrating that manuscript research should be coupled with historical knowledge in order to produce a factual account.<sup>13</sup> It seems as though the confluence of historical inquiry, archival sources, and a family orientation have not yet occurred in the study of the Sades.

Despite the flaws in Plessix Gray's work, it represents one of the first and good faith attempts at a more feminist and family-oriented approach to the history of the Sades. Plessix Gray's book, though, while giving glimpses into the lives of Renée and La Présidente, tells those stories in relation to Donatien because Donatien, perhaps unintentionally, serves as the central focus of the story. Most of Renée's thoughts and actions appear to be in reaction to her husband; thus, *At Home with the Marquis de Sade* gives the impression that Renée did not often speak or act on her own terms, that she did not inhabit her own sphere in the Sade household.

One recent French-language work focusing on Renée, *Renée Pélagie, Marquise de Sade*, was authored by a journalist whose previous works, including a study of the Hottentot Venus phenomenon and a biography of Martha Freud, have centered on women and sexual deviance.<sup>14</sup> This work tries, as many others do, to psychologically explain both Donatien's behavior and Renée's collaboration with him, claiming that Renée's presence assisted Donatien's development as a libertine because "debauchery needs a frame within which to develop, and that frame is none other than marriage." The author tried to "explain" why Renée complied with her husband's perversions and wanted to account for her "rebellion" in 1790, when she shunned her husband and eventually

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<sup>13</sup> Most of the criticisms leveled against Plessix Gray were her presentation of rumor as known historical fact. Using Darnton's criticism, she changed many of the inaccuracies for the paperback edition.

<sup>14</sup> Gérard Badou, *Renée Pélagie, Marquise de Sade* (Payot & Rivages, 2004).

legally separated from him. The focus remains on Donatien and his sexual proclivities without a discussion of Renée's background (other than the labeling of her as a religious zealot) or her daily life while married to Donatien. Thus, even though this biography claims to tell the story of Renée, it runs into the same problem that all works on the Sades have encountered—it fails to offer a satisfying explanation for why Renée stayed married to Donatien through his various “affairs,” only to abandon him.

### **The Lives of Renée and Donatien**

Despite the strong ties the Sade family, and Donatien himself, had to Provence, Donatien's parents spent the majority of their time in Paris. Donatien's father, Jean-Baptiste François Joseph, le Comte de Sade, a devoted and well-known libertine, spent most of his time in the capital city, working as a civil servant. Le Comte honed and practiced his libertine tendencies, for instance frequent homosexual encounters with young men and bisexual tendencies at orgies, during a particularly liberal political climate—the Duc d'Orleans' regency government before the personal reign of Louis XV. When Louis XV came into majority and took over personal rule, he worked diligently to crack down on libertines within his nobility, and as a consequence, the Comte de Sade was arrested several times for sexual misconduct. Donatien's mother, Marie-Eléonore de Maillé de Carman, served as a lady-in-waiting to the Princess before Donatien's birth.

In the summer of 1740, Donatien's mother gave birth to her son in the Condé palace in Paris. While he was intended to be a playmate for the Prince de Condé, Donatien proved to be an unruly child and, at the age of four, was sent to his family's ancestral home of Provence to live with relatives and start his education. Donatien

eventually entered the household of his uncle, Jacques-François Paul Aldonce, l'abbé de Sade, who lived on a familial estate in Saumane. There, Donatien spent five years in the presence of his uncle, a contradictory character. L'abbé was a respected religious scholar, clergyman, and noted libertine who famously hid his mistresses in the château at Saumane when high-ranking church officials came calling. At the end of his five years with l'abbé, Donatien returned to Paris to attend the storied Jesuit *Collège Louis-Le-Grand*. Despite only having lived with his uncle from around the ages of five to ten, l'abbé would remain an important influence in Donatien's life, and l'abbé would involve himself with both Renée and her mother.

Donatien's unremarkable academic career in Paris saw the legal separation of his father and mother and the beginning of the Seven Years' War. At the age of seventeen, Donatien joined the military campaigns of the war. When the war ended in 1763, Donatien returned to Paris, where he enjoyed a lifestyle of parties, women, and prostitutes in line with the precedent set by his father and uncle. In the midst of Donatien's good time in Paris, the Comte, in desperate need of money, began negotiations of a marriage contract between Donatien and Renée-Pélagie de Montreuil. At the same time as, unbeknownst to Donatien, his father began drafting agreements with the Montreuil, the younger Sade fell in love with another woman and fled to Provence to be with her. When she scorned Donatien's advances, Donatien agreed to return to Paris and enact his father's wishes of a marriage with the Montreuil daughter.

Renée, the oldest of the six Montreuil children, spent her childhood between an apartment in Paris and her family's purchased estate in Normandy and attended a girls' convent school [the name of which goes unmentioned even in biographical works

focused on her]. Her lifelong piety serves as evidence of the influence of the convent education she received. Plain and pious, Renée hardly seems the kind woman who would have caught Donatien's eye. However, the Montreuil family caught the Comte's eye. A second-generation *noblesse de robe*, Renée's father served as a judge in the *Cour des Aides*, an office he had inherited from his father. Her mother, a notoriously shrewd and overbearing woman known as "La Présidente" because of her husband's stint as a *president* in the *Cour des Aides*, had assisted her husband in making investments that further enriched the family.

The Montreuil family possessed the same desire as many families who achieved nobility through the purchase of venal offices—the desire to become accepted members of the traditional nobility, with the associated rights and privileges. Estimates indicate that somewhere between 5,510 and 7,180 families gained ennoblement through the purchase of venal offices over the course of the eighteenth century.<sup>15</sup> The nobility in the eighteenth century has been estimated at around 25,000 families; therefore, between one-fifth and one-quarter of noble families gained their status through venal offices.<sup>16</sup> The nature of the relationship between the traditional nobility, the so-called "nobility of the sword," and those ennobled through the purchase and exercise of offices, the "nobility of the robe," remains controversial among historians. Chaussinand-Nogaret's work, considered a classic on the subject, stressed how the nobility extended into new business enterprises and welcomed venal nobles into their ranks through frequent marriages with children of the *noblesse de robe*. He characterized the traditional nobility as an

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<sup>15</sup> William Doyle, *Officers, Nobles, and Revolutionaries: Essays on Eighteenth-Century France* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1995), p. 109.

<sup>16</sup> See Chaussinand-Nogaret, p. 28.

innovative, progressive group who incorporated “bourgeois” values into their world-view. Critics of this view, such as Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Philippe Goujard, and Robert Moro, questioned the capitalistic, open characterization of the nobility that Chaussinand-Nogaret put forth. Accusing Chaussinand-Nogaret of generalizing, they see instead the newly ennobled conforming to traditional ways of thinking and acting and point out the problem of understanding the counter-revolution among the nobility through Chaussinand-Nogaret’s analysis.<sup>17</sup>

Regardless, in many cases, by the eighteenth century, it could be difficult to tell who belonged to the *noblesse de robe* versus the *noblesse d’épée*. France was unique among European nations in its reliance on ennobling offices,<sup>18</sup> and in fact, technically, the Sades had been ennobled through a purchase, although that purchase had been made during the medieval period. By the eighteenth century, the Sade family had been accepted as a traditional noble family and possessed the level of staggering debt that had come to plague provincial noble families in this period.

The economic and political logic behind the marriage of Donatien and Renée was common to eighteenth-century noble marriages. The Sade family, despite its prominence and tenth-century noble pedigree, lived constantly on the verge of bankruptcy by the eighteenth century. In contrast, Renée’s family represented the wealthy bourgeoisie lacking a socially and politically significant aristocratic tradition. Through the marriage of Donatien and Renée, the Sades gained a significant dowry and the security of wealthy in-laws; the Montreuil family tied themselves to an influential aristocratic tradition. The

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<sup>17</sup> For a discussion of the controversy surrounded Chaussinand-Nogaret’s book, see David Higgs, untitled review, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 91, No. 4 (Oct., 1986) pp. 935-936.

<sup>18</sup> William Doyle, *Venality: The Sale of Offices in Eighteenth-Century France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

price of the Montreuil office, as well as the dowry provided by the bride's family, served as evidence of the Montreuil's financial means, both immediate and in the future.

An office in the *Cour des Aides* was desirable not because the work itself brought in much money but because of the social prestige of the office and the fact that the offices were hereditary.<sup>19</sup> One had to be wealthy to purchase an office and maintain it. Offices carried an initial purchase price, as well as various taxes, fees, and additional expenses that were not included in the purchase price. Some of the most expensive ennobling offices were those in the specialty financial courts, of which the *Cour des Aides* was one. These offices tended to cost more even than those in the *parlements*, as members of the financial courts typically did less work than *parlementaires*. This held true for financial courts both in the provinces and in Paris. While provincial financial court offices varied in price throughout the eighteenth century, the Parisian financial court offices held steady at about 150,000 *livres* for an office's purchase price. This could be compared to prices in the tens of thousands of *livres* in the provincial courts.<sup>20</sup> The ability to initially purchase an office of the price of a Parisian *Cour des Aides* office, as well as shoulder the yearly taxes and fees, let alone keep up payment through a second generation, indicated that the office holder was of financial means. In addition, since the holding the office and doing the work did not bring in much income (as these courts were so specialized), the

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

Different venal offices carried different requirements when it came to the ability for an office to be inherited. Most offices in financial courts carried what is termed "second degree nobility," meaning that the noble title granted by the office could be inherited automatically and in full after the office had been occupied by the same family for 20 years or after the deaths of two generations of office-holders from the same family. One of these two requirements had to be satisfied before ennoblement and the office could be inherited by subsequent generations.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 114-115.

fact that the Montreuil family held such an office served as proof of their financial solvency.

The marriage contract drawn up between the Sade and Montreuil families, while not shockingly exorbitant, served as proof of a lasting financial relationship for the two families and gave the Comte immediate access to badly needed monetary resources. The arrangement agreed upon between the Comte and Renée's parents stipulated the Sades would receive an impressive sum of 300,000 *livres*, some in cash while the rest would be paid in future income and inheritance. In addition, the Montreuils promised to provide Renée and Donatien room and board, either in their home in Paris or their property in Normandy, for the first five years of the marriage. In this way, La Présidente had at least some control over what happened to the Montreuil money by not providing the entire 300,000 upfront and paying for the new couple to live on Montreuil property. At the end of the five-year period, the Montreuils would provide Renée and Donatien with an additional 10,000 *livres* with which to start their own household.<sup>21</sup>

It was not as though the Sade side did not contribute to the new life of this young couple. The Sade contributions, though, were not hard dollar like most of those from the Montreuils. Donatien received a Sade family title, which amounted to an income of 10,000 *livres* a year, plus another 10,000 *lives* from a larger payment owed to the Comte from the selling of one of his estates. The Comte set aside 4,000 *lives* to serve as an interest-receiving inheritance for any children that may result from the marriage. Also, the Comte officially emancipated Donatien at the age of 23, two years before the age of emancipation at 25. Thus, Donatien was free to do whatever he wished with his property.

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<sup>21</sup> Lever, p. 108 and Francine du Plessix Gray, *At Home with the Marquis de Sade: A Life* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), p. 55.

This move did not so much advantage Donatien as free the Comte from the repercussions of any mismanagement on Donatien's part. The Comte knew that he could borrow money from Donatien and that if he died a debtor, his debts would then become the responsibility of his son and daughter-in-law.

While the birth of a daughter has been viewed throughout most of history as a hindrance to elite families, a daughter proved to be a particular asset to a family such as the Montreuil. A daughter of a wealthy family could attract the attention of a traditional noble family, as a dowry would surely be paid. As ambitious as La Présidente was, it can be assumed that she counted on her daughters as a way of gaining entrée into higher echelons of French society. Renée was likely groomed to be the wife of an impoverished, long-standing nobleman. Her duty to her family was to act as a tie between her family and her husband's family.

The marriage was, however, uncommon for eighteenth century noble families in several distinct ways. Firstly, the two married at the relatively young age of 23.<sup>22</sup> The rush to marriage could be explained by the desire to calm Donatien and for both families' respective gains from the union. The marriage was also uncommon in that Donatien and Renée never met before the engagement was finalized. While arranged marriage remains a persistent stereotype of *ancien régime* nobility, not necessarily undeservedly since it had been widely practiced, historians have pointed out the flourishing of the idea of

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<sup>22</sup> Statistics for the average age of first marriage in the eighteenth century indicate that the average age for women was 25-26 and the average age for men was 27-28. See François Lebrun, *La vie conjugale sous l'ancien régime* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1993) or Philippe Dumas, ed., *Familles en révolution: Vie et changements familiales en Ile de France, changements et continuités, 1775-1825* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2003).



romantic love within the noble classes of the eighteenth century.<sup>23</sup> Marriages still were contracts made between families, but daughters and sons typically had more say in their marriages than before. However, Donatien and Renée were left with little choice, and their compatibility was of little consequence to their families.

The first year of Renée's marriage to Donatien set the stage for the rest of their relationship. Renée and Donatien had been living on the Montreuil estate in Normandy since their wedding. In October of 1763, while alone in Paris ostensibly on business, Donatien was accused of uttering heretical statements in the presence of a prostitute he had hired. This led to his imprisonment at Vincennes by *lettre de cachet*. While he spent less than a month under arrest, this incident put Donatien on the radar of the royal police. This led to a rather involved police dossier on Donatien that tracked his activities with prostitutes, courtesans, and actresses. Various biographies of Sade detail these trysts, and correspondence between Donatien's mother-in-law and uncle revealed that both parties knew of Donatien's proclivities and conspired to keep this information from Renée for as long as possible.

At this point, Donatien and La Présidente got along, and Donatien's mother-in-law respected his wit, charm, intelligence, and outgoing personality, characteristics she saw missing in her own daughter. The disappointment La Présidente felt at Renée's personality and lack of sharp intellect was partly alleviated by the characteristics Renée's husband possessed. Thus, Renée's mother was willing to conspire to keep her daughter ignorant of Donatien's interactions with other women. The falling-out between Donatien

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<sup>23</sup> For example, see Amanda Vickery's *The Gentleman's Daughter* or Cissie Fairchild's "Women and the Family" in Samia I. Spencer, ed., *French Women and the Age of Enlightenment* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

and La Présidente only occurred after Donatien seduced Ann-Prospère, Renée's younger sister, who came to stay at La Coste in 1771. Because he ruined Ann-Prospère's chances of achieving an advantageous marriage akin to Renée's, Donatien became a target for La Présidente, as she later assisted in many of his arrests. However, despite the bad feelings she had for Donatien, she still tried to support her daughter to keep the marriage intact, as her family still stood to benefit from the association despite Donatien's behavior.

By 1771, Renée had given birth to all of the three children she had with Donatien. Their eldest son, Louis-Marie, was born in 1767 while Renée and Donatien were in Paris. Two years later, their second son, Donatien-Claude-Armand was born. Renée's only daughter, Madeleine-Laure, was born in April of 1771, during Renée's sister's stay at La Coste. While Donatien was absent during a significant portion of the children's young lives, he seemed to be a doting, loving father when he was present in the household. Renée kept as much information about Donatien's situation from the children as possible, telling them, for instance, that he was traveling in Spain during his imprisonments. When Madeleine-Laure went off to boarding school, it was much easier to not have to explain Donatien's absences to her. Renée was by all accounts a devoted mother to her three children, and their on-going loyalty to both of their parents, even through Donatien's troubles towards the end of his life, attest to the close relationship they had with both of their parents.

After his release from Vincennes in 1763, Donatien spent his time between Paris and La Coste, and he oversaw the building of La Coste's theater, where Donatien held productions of his infamous original works. The Sade family had been plagued by debt for generations, and Donatien's lavish spending on La Coste's furnishings and its theater

did not help alleviate the financial strain. The Comte de Sade's death in 1767 left Donatien and Renée not only with their own debt, but with the unpaid debts of Donatien's father, further worsening the financial situation. The next year, in 1768, Donatien spent a few months again in prison because of a *lettre de cachet* involving the abuse of a prostitute. The level of financial insolvency of the Sade family led to another brief imprisonment of Donatien in 1771, this time for debt. During her husband's imprisonments, Renée was left alone in Normandy and later at La Coste, where she assumed responsibility for the household. The only assistance Renée had during these periods was that of Ripert, Fage, and Gaufridy.

The summer of 1772 marked the legal fiasco that would plague Donatien for years, which became known as the Marseilles Affair. While in Marseilles, Donatien and his valet participated in orgies, during which Donatien gave some of the women the insect-derived aphrodisiac known as Spanish Fly. After they became ill and reported Donatien to authorities, Donatien was found guilty of sodomy and poisoning and the government issued another *lettre de cachet* for his arrest. La Présidente aided the authorities in finding Donatien, and he spent a few months at the prison of Miolans before he escaped. After his escape, he spent time in hiding at La Coste, with Renée's consent and assistance, until La Présidente arranged for a police raid of the château. Donatien escaped again, and this time went into hiding in Italy, during which time he kept in regular correspondence with his wife and with Gaufridy. The raid, though, further soured relations between Donatien and Renée and La Présidente. It also led to the firing of the Sade advisor Fage, who assisted La Présidente in locating Donatien's likely whereabouts. Especially during this period, Renée relied on Gaufridy to field

correspondence between her and her mother, as Renée felt anger at her mother's intrusions into their lives at La Coste.

Even as La Présidente sought to neutralize Donatien, she still worked behind the scenes to keep Renée's marriage and status as the Marquise de Sade in good standing. During this period, she never counseled Renée to separate from Donatien even though she worked to imprison her son-in-law; she only agitated for separation as the Revolution drew near. She financially supported Renée, and in 1775, she covered up a potential legal scandal emanating from the household of La Coste. A few household servants began to protest their treatment at La Coste, alleging, among other things, sexual mistreatment. Hearing news of this, La Présidente worked to quell the potential scandal, paying off some accusers for their silence and even having one servant arrested and imprisoned via *lettre de cachet*. This unrest, however, set off a series of conflicts between the Sades and their household staff.

One potential cause of these conflicts was that Renée was having difficulty paying her staff. She had asked Gaufridy to take out loans and find lines of credit in order to pay the staff and the "expenses of the château."<sup>24</sup> Previous correspondence made it evident that Renée paid her domestics with money so they could buy their own food and clothing; the château did not provide this for them.<sup>25</sup> An inability to pay the household staff meant that they did not receive any compensation for their work. As tensions rose, the

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<sup>24</sup> M. Gaufridy à M. Ripert, D'Apt, 22 octobre 1774, in Alice M. Laborde, *Correspondances du marquis de Sade et de ses proches enrichies de documents, notes et commentaries, vol. VII. 1773-1776, la vie quotidienne au château de La Coste* (Geneva: Editions Slatkine, 1994).

<sup>25</sup> Note du marquis à M. Ripert, 1771/1772, in Alice M. Laborde, *Correspondances du marquis de Sade et de ses proches enrichies de documents, notes et commentaries, vol. V. oct. 1771-27 juin 1772, le marquis et la marquise de Sade au château de la Coste* (Geneva: Editions Slatkine, 1994).

household became violent. In 1776, La Coste's cook twice tried to kill Donatien. Due to these issues, in 1777, Donatien, Renée, their children, and a few close household staff members left La Coste for Paris.

Upon the Sades' arrival in Paris, Donatien was arrested on a *lettre de cachet* that his mother-in-law had previously obtained. Imprisoned again at Vincennes, Donatien managed to escape prison again and hid at La Coste for a few months before he was found and re-arrested. In the meantime, he had been cleared of charges related to the Marseilles Affair through an appeal, but his re-arrest stuck because of La Présidente's *lettre de cachet*.

Eventually, in 1784, Donatien was transferred to the Bastille. During his imprisonment in this iconic monument, Donatien wrote a great deal, both letters to his wife and friends and fictional literary works. He just missed being freed from the Bastille in 1789, as a few days earlier he was transferred once again, this time to the asylum of Charenton. The National Assembly's vote to overturn royal *lettres de cachet* in 1790 led to Donatien's release from Charenton. He returned to Paris to find that Renée, who had been living in the convent of Sainte-Aure during his imprisonment, had sued for separation and demanded the repayment of her dowry—a demand never satisfied. Legally separated from his wife, Donatien joined the revolutionary government and took on the name *citoyen* Louis. While he continued to publish his fictional works, Donatien also began to publish political pamphlets and quickly rose in revolutionary section's government.

Not surprisingly, Donatien initially embraced the tenets of the revolution. He was repeatedly a victim of the arbitrary powers exercised by the absolutist regime through his imprisonment via *lettres de cachet*. His philosophical views of individuality, libertinism,

and anti-clericalism fit with the revolutionary spirit. He thus initially embraced the revolutionary agenda, only to become disillusioned after his arrest during the Terror and another arrest for indecency under Napoleon's government. Although one might imagine that a titled member of the traditional nobility would be more likely to reject the principles of the Revolution, the opposite pattern is visible in the story of the Sade couple. It was, rather, the Montreuil and Gaspard Gaufridy, who did not enjoy the social privileges accorded to the traditional nobility, who became vehement opponents of the revolutionary movement.

While Donatien was imprisoned during the years 1787-1790, Renée wrote to him, keeping him updated on the political events of the pre-revolutionary era. Their letters demonstrate the growing political disagreements between the two. Renée criticized Donatien's hopeful attitude regarding reform and the meeting of the Estates General.<sup>26</sup> She countered Donatien's sympathy with the spirit of the Revolution with anecdotes from outside prison walls. In April of 1789, she reported of the Réveillon riots that "people were fired on; a lot were killed...more innocent perished than guilty."<sup>27</sup> She told of the violent anti-clerical rhetoric permeating the capital, saying "some want to see *les calotins* [men of the cloth] dance."<sup>28</sup> Renée told Donatien that "none dares to speak or think aloud until decent folk gain the upper hand" and that "the townspeople are having terrible

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<sup>26</sup> For a sampling of Renée's letters to her husband specifically on this subject, see David McCallam, "Third Person Singular: the Liberation of the Marquise de Sade, 1789-1790," in Caroline Bland and Maire Cross, eds., *Gender and Politics in the Age of Letter-Writing, 1750-2000* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 55-65.

<sup>27</sup> Alice M. Laborde, *Correspondances du marquis de Sade et de ses proches enrichies de documents, notes et commentaires, vol. XXI, 1789, de la Bastille à Charenton. 1790, la libération de Sade*, p. 39, in David McCallam, "Third Person Singular: the Liberation of the Marquise de Sade, 1789-1790."

<sup>28</sup> Laborde, vol. XXI, p. 89 in Ibid.

trouble in keeping, and in getting, flour in order to stop the crowds gathering.”<sup>29</sup> Her retellings of these events to Donatien represented her attempt to give him a real-world depiction of what was happening.

As she shared news with Donatien, Renée’s language became more personal. For instance, her initial reports used phrases like “one says” or “I have heard that” when she retold events, insinuating she relied on second-hand sources, whether or not this was true. This distanced Renée from the criticisms implicit in her reports of violence and food shortages. However, Renée admitted to Donatien that keeping up with the chaotic events and inconsistent rhetoric, as well as constantly fearing what tomorrow might bring and not knowing how to react to events, began to wear on her.<sup>30</sup> Her politics finally became personal in a letter to Gaufridy in November of 1789, when she told him “every day we [the nobility and clergy] are threatened by massacres...we go to bed each night unsure of the next day.”<sup>31</sup> Her use of the pronoun “we” when referring to the First and Second Estates demonstrated her identification with these orders and the hardships the agitation of the early Revolution forced them to face. While Donatien viewed the Revolution as having the potential to overturn the elements of absolutism he saw as oppressive and corrupt, Renée came to see the Revolutionary tide as an attack on her and her way of life.

Upon his release from Charenton in 1790, Donatien sought to reconnect with his wife. He presented himself at Sainte-Aure and requested a meeting with her, a request that she denied. She never actually saw him in person again and filed for a separation from Donatien shortly thereafter. The end of Donatien’s life-long friendship with

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<sup>29</sup> Laborde, vol. XXI, p. 110 in Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Laborde, vol. XXI, p. 111 in Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Laborde, vol. XXI, p. 131 in Ibid.

Gaufridy came about due to arguments over Donatien's participation in the revolutionary government and Gaufridy's support of counter-revolutionary forces within France.

After Renée's rejection, Donatien threw himself into participating in the political changes brought on by the Revolution. One of Donatien's tasks as president of his section of Paris was signing death warrants and sending people to the guillotine. Despite the violence he had exhibited in his life, and that portrayed in his written works, Donatien did not enjoy this responsibility, and his criticism of it led to his arrest by Robespierre's government in 1793. One of the warrants that came across his desk in the summer of 1793 was for his former in-laws, the Montreuil. La Présidente had been his constant tormentor for years, sending him to prison on multiple occasions. When faced with the prospect of signing an order for her beheading, Donatien instead helped the Montreuil escape persecution, making himself a target of the Terror. Donatien narrowly escaped execution under the Terror but was released from prison in October of 1794.

Donatien's political fervor diminished due to his experiences with the Revolutionary government, and he again found himself in dire financial straits. Inflation meant that he made even less money off of his estates than he ever did, and in 1796, with the help of Gaufridy, he sold La Coste. In an attempt to secure income, Donatien began writing and publishing, but the lewd nature of his works led to another arrest in 1801. In order to avoid a public trial in which the illicit nature of his works would be heralded, Renée and their three children agreed to pay for Donatien to be imprisoned once again in the asylum of Charenton, where he would spend the rest of his life. Renée died in 1810, after years of declining health. Donatien lived a full existence in Charenton, taking



lovers and helping the director of the asylum explore theatre as therapy for the mentally ill. In 1814, Donatien died in his sleep at Charenton.

Only one of three Sade children did not outlive his parents; Louis-Marie, the eldest Sade child, died one year before Renée, in 1809, during an ambush while he was serving in Napoleon's army. Donatien-Claude-Armand lived an unremarkable existence. He married in 1808 and spent most of his life seeking to destroy his father's unpublished pornographic manuscripts. Perhaps because he carried his father's name, Donatien-Claude openly criticized his father's published works and tried to distance his family's name from his father's reputation. However, he still associated with Donatien up until Donatien's death, as he and his siblings continually provided for Donatien's room and board at Charenton. Madeleine-Laure grew into an image of her mother—a quiet, plain, and devout woman who spent her adult life as a boarder at the Parisian convent of Sainte-Aure, the same convent in which her mother lodged until her death. Unlike her mother, though, Madeleine-Laure never married and died in 1844.

### **Interpreting Renée**

While this study focuses on Renée, the brief narrative of Donatien, and her life with him, reveals important information about her life as the daughter of the *noblesse de robe* who married into the traditional nobility. The specifics of her life with Donatien were unique, but many of her experiences demonstrate what a woman of her social standing encountered when creating a bridge between new and old nobility. Renée spent most of her time away from her husband, as Donatien was in and out of prison, due either to escape or official release. Many provincial noblemen had cause to be away from their

households, be it because of military service, business, or an attempt to gain favors at court. Renée brought to her provincial life an educational background similar to that of other elite women in the eighteenth century, a background fully explored in the next chapter. Practically unprepared for her role as manager of a provincial household and estate, she relied on a close group of male advisors to assist her in the seemingly futile task of keeping the Sade family solvent and the household orderly.

For Sade biographers, the most baffling characteristic of Renée has remained the seemingly sudden change of heart regarding her husband that she demonstrated in 1790. The only biographer who attempted to account for Renée's actions was Lever, who did put Renée's decision to separate from her husband into a larger social and political context. The author proposed that emotional factors explained Renée's suit for separation, claiming she simply fell out of love with her husband, as can happen after almost 30 years of marriage. In addition, Lever emphasized Renée's religious inclinations as the main reason for her decision to leave her husband.<sup>32</sup> Donatien supported the revolutionary movement, and, as it became apparent that the Revolution considered the Church an enemy, Renée felt her values were being attacked both at home and in public. She lived in a convent during Donatien's imprisonment, and was thus surrounded by those who supported her devout religious beliefs. At the same time, Renée succumbed to her family's repeated requests that she separate from her problematic and no longer useful husband. Lever's is by far the most honest attempt at contextualizing Renée's behavior. However, his work lacks an analysis of the reasons for Renée's marriage and of the plight of *noblesse de robe* families seeking to enter a different social

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<sup>32</sup> Lever, pp. 360-363.

category. Likewise, his work does not explain what legal separation meant for couples, or try to understand how it may have factored into the financial strategy of Renée and her family.

The focus on Donatien, his pornographic works, and his personal sexual perversions has skewed the modern interpretation of Renée and her actions. While such a focus in Sade studies is understandable, it fails to give an convincing account for why Renée behaved the way she did towards her husband because the entire context of Renée's experiences have largely been ignored. It can be assumed that Renée had been groomed to marry into the nobility from the time she was a child. Her parents clearly intended for their daughters to enter into socially advantageous marriages, as evidenced by their aggressive and early pursuit of the Sade family and by La Présidente's rage towards Donatien after his sexual exploits with her younger daughter destroyed her chances of securing a similar marriage arrangement. While Renée never wrote about her childhood, she most likely had been primed to advance the Montreuil family by securing and sustaining a marriage to a long-ennobled family's son. When La Présidente learned that, even after his marriage to Renée, Donatien still intended to pursue his sexual exploits, she attempted to keep as much information as possible from Renée regarding Donatien's actions. At that point, what mattered most to the Montreuil family was that Renée's marriage with Donatien stay intact, and trying to hide Donatien's proclivities from Renée for as long as possible was one strategy La Présidente employed to ensure the marriage lasted.

Renée experienced familial pressure to keep her marriage together and uphold the reputations of both the Montreuil and Sade families. Regardless of how Renée felt about

her husband and his sexual exploits, she knew that her *raison d'être* was to enhance the Montreuil's social standing through an association with a family like the Sade family. In order to do so, Renée had to keep Donatien happy, to keep the enacting of his transgressions in the private space of the home, and to try to keep up the appearance of honor on the part of the Sades.<sup>33</sup> She concerned herself not only with Donatien's personal reputation and the reputation of her marriage but also with the appearance of financial freedom and luxury despite bankruptcy. All of these actions fit together to paint the picture of a woman who worked to uphold the reputations of her family and of the provincial nobility into which she married.

Realizing that Renée occupied herself by trying to salvage the image of the Sades and by furthering the social ambitions of the Montreuil family explained what has been labeled her bizarre or uncharacteristic actions in 1790. Throughout the entire marriage, Renée stood by Donatien, defending him publicly, hiding him from the authorities, supplying him with practical, luxurious, and even illicit goods while imprisoned, and dutifully writing to him in prison. Public accusations of poisoning, sexual deviancy, and even pederasty, coupled with a desperate financial situation, had not prevented her from supporting Donatien. And yet, upon his release from prison in 1790, she seemingly suddenly turned her back on him without giving a reason.

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<sup>33</sup> Despite La Présidente's and L'abbé's attempts to keep Renée in the dark when it came to Donatien's sexual behaviors, Renée inevitably learned the truth. Sade biographies detail how Renée allowed and even facilitated Donatien's sexual exploits while at home in La Coste. Renée felt as though keeping his transgressions private was better than having them become publicly known. In one instance, labeled as "the little girls affair," Renée helped Donatien hire several teenage servants who served as his sexual partners. When word of what was happening at La Coste got back to the families of the girls, the parents pressed legal charges. According to Lever, when questioned by authorities, the girls had nothing but positive things to say about Renée, who remained a caring hostess and overseer throughout their "employment."

The reason for Donatien's release, though, the Revolution and the beginning of the unraveling of the Old Regime, effectively negated the entire logic behind her marriage. Renée, through her tie to Donatien, moved her family from the Third into the Second Estate, that of the traditional, landed nobility. As the Revolutionary government began to chip away at social privilege and the entire concept of nobility, Renée may have realized that a tie to Donatien no longer mattered for her parents, her, or her children. It certainly did not help that Donatien embraced revolutionary ideals. His relationship with Renée was not the only one damaged by his support of the events that began in 1789; Gaufridy and Donatien eventually had a falling-out based on differing political views.

While those who have studied Sade have easily identified politics as the wedge that came between Donatien and his best friend, they have not factored this into the rift between Donatien and Renée. This is likely due to a focus on the illicit sexual details that dominate discussions of Donatien's marriage, which did not enter into his relationship with Gaufridy. Renée's letters to Donatien demonstrated that she was well aware of the political situation and did not approve of it. When entrance into a new level of nobility no longer mattered, one of the pillars supporting Renée's marriage to Donatien crumbled, which weakened the entire foundation. Perhaps because she was a woman, and a woman know for being simple, emotional and sexual motivations have trumped potential political and social motivations for her decision to end her marriage to Donatien.

Those who have written biographies of Donatien and Renée have ignored the issue of legal separation in eighteenth-century France; in fact, one has even gone so far as to use "separation" and "divorce" interchangeably, even though divorce was not legalized

in France at the time that Renée secured her separation from Donatien.<sup>34</sup> During Renée's life, two options existed in France for women who wished to end their marital association with their husbands—a separation of property (*séparation de biens*) or a separation of person (*separation de corps*). While not a divorce, a separation of person allowed a woman to live separately and independently from her husband. These separations were usually granted only in cases of extreme abuse and were rather uncommon in the eighteenth century. On the other hand, a separation of goods was easier to obtain during this period. A separation of goods financially separated a woman from her husband. The result of such an action could be the repayment of a woman's dowry money, the repayment of any misuse of intended inheritance, and the protection of a family inheritance from a spouse who seemed apt to squander it. A separation like this protected a woman from responsibility to her husband's creditors and, importantly, positioned the wife as the husband's number one creditor, making her able to reclaim her dowry before other debts were settled.<sup>35</sup>

Renée had indicated to Gaufridy that she feared for her children's inheritance, due to Donatien's financial troubles. Thus, her decision to separate from Donatien was likely a decision to protect her children. Although the court ordered Donatien to repay part of Renée's dowry, he never did, and Renée probably expected that he never would. But, when it seemed as though he would be out of prison for good, the amount of financial

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<sup>34</sup> Laurence L. Bongie, *Sade: A Biographical Essay* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

<sup>35</sup> Suzanne Desan, "Making and Breaking Marriage: An Overview of Old Regime Marriage as Social Practice," in Susan Desan and Jeffery Merrick, eds., *Family, Gender, and Law in Early Modern France* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009), pp. 1-25.

trouble he could potentially cause increased, and Renée began to think about the problems he could cause for her children.

Although finances help explain the timing of Renée's suit, it is likely that she did not arrive at this decision lightly. A separation from a husband put a woman in social limbo. A separated woman could not remarry and could no longer live with her husband; women in this situation usually lived with their parents or became boarders in convents.<sup>36</sup> Since Renée had already been living at Sainte-Aure, though, that perhaps made her decision an easier one. It was understood in the eighteenth century that the property a woman brought into a marriage would either help her in widowhood or would pass down to children as lineage property, along with any lineage property the husband possessed. A parent in control of lineage property was to act as a "temporary custodian" of property and ensure it arrived to the children intact.<sup>37</sup> Donatien had been violating this custom, and a legal financial separation from him was the only way Renée could guarantee her children would receive their inheritance intact.

Renée was granted the separation, an action the courts in France took seriously in this period. In coming to a decision as to whether or not to grant a separation, judges took several factors into consideration, including the degree of financial mismanagement by one or both spouses, any charges of physical violence made by one party against the other, and the reputations of the families of the individuals seeking the separation. In fact, reputation became an important factor in deciding outcomes of physical and property separations, a situation that surely advantaged Renée when she sought a

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p. 18.

<sup>37</sup> Barbara B. Diefendorf, "Women and Property in Ancien Régime France: Theory and Practice in Dauphiné and Paris," in John Brewer and Susan Staves, eds., *Early Modern Conceptions of Property* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 184.

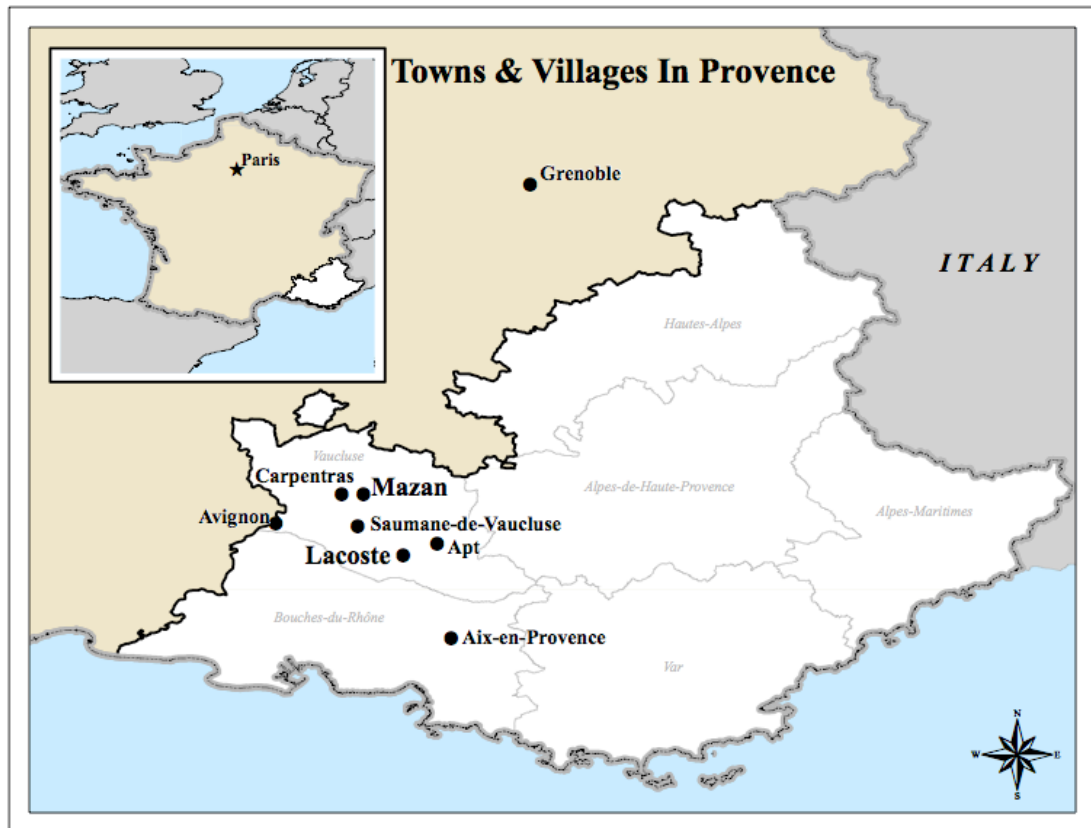
separation from Donatien, a man with a widely-known and notorious reputation. One case study of an eighteenth-century legal separation suit between Aglaé Langeac, the Marquise de Chambonas and her husband demonstrated the importance of family reputation.<sup>38</sup> The Marquise, the daughter of scandalous libertines and notorious political intriguers, lost her suit for separation from her husband because “she, along with her parents, embodied the sexual and political disorders of the reign of Louis XV that many...wanted to put behind them.”<sup>39</sup> While the Marquise de Chambonas made claims of emotional, verbal, and physical abuse, her husband maintained his innocence and accused his wife of infidelity. In a he-said she-said case, involving witnesses for both parties, the court favored the Marquis, the less controversial figure. In the same way, the upstanding Montreuil and the pious Renée won out over Donatien’s personal and familial reputation and his associations with libertinism and the corruptions of the Old Regime. Renée was able to separate her money, and her children’s future inheritance, from Donatien. This separation did not mean the end of Renée’s association with Donatien, though, as she continued to support him during his end of life imprisonment in Charenton, although she did so from a distance.

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<sup>38</sup> Jeffrey Merrick, “Marital Conflict in Political Context: Langeac vs. Chambonas, 1775,” in Susan Desan and Jeffrey Merrick, eds., pp. 137-182.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, p. 158-9.





### **La Coste: Town and Chateau**

Much of Renée's married life was spent approximately twenty-five miles east of Avignon, in the small village of La Coste. A medieval village that has changed little over time, present-day La Coste boasts a population of approximately 400, which is in line with the number of inhabitants who called La Coste home in the eighteenth century. The Sade family had inhabited the region of Provence since before the tenth century, at which point they gained their noble title. Through participation in the local textile trade, the family aggrandized their holdings and built and occupied châteaux throughout the region of Provence, including La Coste, the preferred village of Donatien.

While Donatien's presence in the village serves as its most obvious claim to notoriety, the small town was no stranger to controversy long before Donatien's arrival and remained so long after his departure. La Coste sits at the heart of a deeply Catholic region of what once was a deeply Catholic country. La Coste's proximity to Avignon, the temporary home of the papacy, further cemented this association. However, La Coste represented a pocket of Protestantism within Provence and was the site of several late sixteenth-century religious massacres. Two centuries after the death of the Marquis de Sade, La Coste and the surrounding areas became an important base for the French Resistance during the Second World War, partly due to the cover afforded by the Luberon mountain ranges. For the last fifty years, La Coste has been run by a mayor representing the Communist party, a party that never gained a strong foothold in French politics nationally. These events have led the journalist Tony Perrottet, who has traveled extensively in the area and written pieces on La Coste and the Marquis, to characterize La Coste as always having had a "contrarian streak."<sup>40</sup>

The most easily identified landmark in the village of La Coste is the Sade château of the same name. Credited as being Donatien's favorite house and property, La Coste is where Donatien and his wife Renée housed their family and associated household staff. Renée and her three children spent their Provençal existence at La Coste, and it can be assumed that Donatien would have as well had he not been otherwise occupied with his "travels." A lavishly-appointed 42-bedroom château, La Coste had been in the possession of some line of the Sade family for centuries. It was officially bequeathed to

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<sup>40</sup> Tony Perrottet, "Well-Traveled: The Pervert's Grand Tour (The Devil's Playground, The Marquis de Sade is Dead! Long Live Pierre Cardin!, and The Curse of the Château Sade)" in *Slate* <[www.slate.com](http://www.slate.com)>, December 18, 2008.

Donatien's direct branch of the family in 1710.<sup>41</sup> After legal and political circumstances forced Donatien, Renée, and their children to leave La Coste for Paris in 1777, the structure fell into disuse. Villagers set the house on fire during the countryside peasant revolts of the Revolution. In 1792, financial circumstances led Donatien to sell the château, and it gradually fell into ruin over the centuries.<sup>42</sup>

One of many contributing factors to the financial problems that Renée and Donatien faced was the lavish manner in which La Coste was appointed and maintained. As historians have noted, the physical appearance of a household, as well as the items within it, was very important to people in the eighteenth century, as it "marked their social status (real or invented), projected their identity, determined how they entertained, and constituted a substantial portion of their property."<sup>43</sup> This was especially true of the provincial nobility, as interior decorating was a way for those nobles distanced from the capital to create an image of connection with the Parisian elite and the royal government by mimicking the styles and trends of Parisian interior decorating. Eighteenth-century

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<sup>41</sup> Testament de Madame Elisabeth de Simiane, Marquise de Crillon, 6 mars 1710, in Laborde, Vol. V.

<sup>42</sup> The chateau of La Coste existed in the countryside as dilapidated ruins until 2001, when French fashion icon Pierre Cardin purchased the property and began renovations. Cardin's vision was to turn La Coste into a cultural mecca and tourist destination. This undertaking has not been without controversy, as local residents are split between support for and disdain for Cardin's efforts.

Several journalistic accounts of Pierre Cardin's undertakings in La Coste give insight into the controversy surrounding his presence. In addition to Tony Perrottet's travel blogs, see for example: Angelique Chrisafis, "Big Trouble in Little La Coste as Locals Fight Pierre Cardin's 'St Tropez of Culture' Plan," in *The Guardian*, 7 June, 2008 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/jun/07/france.fashion>> and John Lichfield, "Does La Coste Want the Grand Designs of Pierre Cardin? Non, Merci," in *The Independent* <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/does-lacoste-want-the-grand-designs-of-pierre-cardin-inon-mercii-1774053.html>>.

<sup>43</sup> Dena Goodman and Kathryn Noberg, eds., *Furnishing the Eighteenth Century: What Furniture Can Tell Us About the European and American Past* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 1.

provincial interiors became important ways to attest to the social station, wealth, taste, and culture of the home's owners and inhabitants.<sup>44</sup>

Inventories taken by Gaufridy after the Sade's departure from La Coste give an impression of the surroundings in which Renée lived while in the château.<sup>45</sup> As mentioned earlier, the house itself had 42 rooms that served various functions. An over-40 page inventoried list of La Coste's effects provides a glimpse into the physical lifestyle the Sades enjoyed in their provincial château. The effects of the 22 bedrooms are listed, as well as those of the kitchen, dining room, side rooms, offices, bathrooms, closets, foyers, and the chapel. A room for storing meat and other perishable food items existed near to the kitchen area.

The furniture and other accoutrements of the rooms were comfortable, modern, and fashionable. Each bedroom boasted a bed frame with a mattress for comfort, an evolution from having benches or bed rolls on the floor for sleeping. Each bedroom had unique, themed cotton bedding in vibrant solids or prints. This bedding gave each room its name, as the dominant color of the bedding differed from room to room. Gaufridy referred to the bedrooms as the "blue room" or the "green room" in his inventory. Monochromatic rooms were the height of interior fashion in eighteenth-century France. The use of a different, single color in each room demonstrated a deliberate choice and careful planning when it came to interior decorating, and such a use of color created the

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<sup>44</sup> Donna Bohanan, "Color Schemes and Decorative Tastes in the Noble Households of Old Regime Dauphiné," in Dena Goodman and Kathryn Noberg, eds., *Furnishing the Eighteenth Century: What Furniture Can Tell Us About the European and American Past* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 117.

<sup>45</sup> Etat des Meubles et effets du château de la coste commencé le 4 novembre 1778, in Laborde, Vol. V.

impression of a pleasing, unified, and dramatic space.<sup>46</sup> While Gaufridy described the colors in the Sade rooms using generic terms such as *bleu* or *vert*, inventories of noble households in Dauphiné demonstrated that the concept of color began to expand during this time period. In order to be as accurate as possible, notaries described colors more richly, noting that brown was “coffee” brown and branched into nuances of color, such as ochre instead of yellow. While Gaufridy was not as creative in his labeling of the Sade bedrooms, Renée and Donatien certainly purposely chose not only the colors for the rooms, but the shade of each color in order to create the most pleasing effect.

Separate bathrooms contained bathtubs, bidets, and commodes for adults and children who lived in or stayed in the château. The bidet, an imported item originating in Italy, began to appear more frequently in elite households during the eighteenth century.<sup>47</sup> The bidet was certainly a luxury, something not necessary to daily life that indicated new standards of personal hygiene available only to the wealthy. Habitants and guests of La Coste were also provided with sponges for bathing and dental hygiene items. Donatien was known to be fastidious about his teeth in an era when dental hygiene was not recognized as particularly important to overall health. La Coste, then, was cutting-edge not only in aesthetic style but also in the creature comforts it provided to inhabitants and visitors.

Rooms of all kinds, from bedrooms to studies, even the kitchen, featured some kind of artwork on the walls, often paintings or tapestries. Tapestries served both functional and decorative purposes in early modern and eighteenth-century households.

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<sup>46</sup> Bohanan, p. 118.

<sup>47</sup> Annik Pardailhé-Galabrun, trans. Jocelyn Phelps, *The Birth of Intimacy: Privacy and Domestic Life in Early Modern Paris* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), p. 137.

Tapestries could be woven to please any number of artistic tastes, and thus served the same aesthetic purpose as paintings and drawings. They also could be strategically placed in the home to cover drafts, serve as heating insulation during the winter, and manipulate the acoustics of a room. While households of all social levels might contain tapestries, fine tapestry could cost into the thousands of *livres*, depending upon size, origin, and quality.<sup>48</sup> The same went for paintings; while even poorer households displayed art on the walls, wealthier households displayed artwork of superior size and quality. When elites chose the artwork to adorn their walls, they based their decisions upon personal taste and what would fit best with their deliberately created décor; the name and reputation of the artist did not matter to purveyors of art in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>49</sup>

A detailed description of one of the many rooms in La Coste gives a concrete representation of the way the Sades constructed their living space. For instance, La Coste's dining room attested to the comfortable, expensive, and cultured tastes reflected in the main Sade mansion. Four *grands tableaux* adorned the dining room walls, and served as evidence of classical and neo-classical tastes: *The School of Athens*, *The Death of Alexander*, *Josué Arrêtant le Soleil*, and a *Madeleine*. Two mirrors hung on the room's walls as well; one plain mirror and one adorned with the Sade coat of arms. Mirrors were very popular across the social spectrum, and if purposely placed, they could make an interior space seem bigger or reflect light throughout the room from limited light sources. What made a mirror a rich man's mirror or a poor man's mirror was the size of the glass

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, p. 158.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

and the type of frame that encased the mirror.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, a mirror such as the Sade's coat of arms mirror represented an expensive piece. Curtains tied with silk cords framed the dining room's windows. When guests dined at La Coste, they ate upon a marble table framed by 24 cloth-upholstered chairs. This room was typical of those in the château and served as evidence of Donatien's desire to give the impression of wealth and extravagance, characteristics expected of a provincial noble, despite the fact that he and Renée were nearly always bankrupt and financed most of their purchases on credit.

Not only did Gaufridy catalog the furniture and accessories of each room; he also painstakingly listed all of the books in La Coste's library.<sup>51</sup> Donatien considered himself a genius, a philosopher, and man of the Enlightenment; he amassed an impressive collection of books for his library. Around 430 entries appear in Gaufridy's unofficial card catalog of Donatien's library. The titles include religious titles, classical works, geography, past and contemporary philosophy, memoirs, and political histories. The authors are European, ranging from classical Greek and Roman writers to British, French, and Italian authors. At a time when bound, published books represented a costly investment, La Coste housed an impressive stock of these items. The library at La Coste represented a typical library for the wealthy, educated, enlightened nobility in the eighteenth century.<sup>52</sup>

Gaufridy's detailed inventories described the physical nature of a provincial noble household in the eighteenth-century and shed light on how nobles themselves expected to

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p. 164.

<sup>51</sup> Etat des Meubles et effets du chateau de la coste commencé le 4 novembre 1778, in Laborde, Vol. V.

<sup>52</sup> See Pardailhé-Galabrun, p. 183 for a discussion of inventories of libraries belonging to the Parisian elite.

live. Most studies on the French provincial nobility concentrate on the medieval and early modern periods; the transition into the eighteenth century sees a historiographical shift to concentrating on the *noblesse de robe* and the urban, professional classes. Interest in the provincial nobility of this period has not been as strong, especially when it comes to matters outside of the immediately political realm. Inventories like the La Coste inventory demonstrate that the material world of the eighteenth century provincial nobility in many ways mimicked the material changes typical in elite urban households. The consumer revolution that was transforming habits of eating, clothing, and home furnishing—not to mention credit—clearly found its way to provincial estates.

A study of the material status of La Coste reveals that, despite their financially precarious situation, Donatien and Renée expected to live in a modern, lavish environment. This was, and always had been, an important marker of noble status. As household and estate manager of Sade properties, Renée concerned herself with upholding their status and reputation, and one of the ways she did that was to keep the physical environment in line with familial and societal expectations. La Coste demonstrated that the Sades possessed “a clear concern for elegance”<sup>53</sup> and were willing to engage in financially destructive behaviors in order to meet the fashionable ideal of a noble lifestyle in the eighteenth century.

This dissertation addresses the lack of scholarship on French noblewomen by using Renée’s story as a vehicle to investigate the familial, financial, and legal lives women led during this period. This is a first step in exploring the contributions women made to not only their families, but also local, regional, and national economies during

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid, p. 143.



the eighteenth century. The pressures that Renée faced and the responsibilities that she bore were characteristic of not only provincial noblewomen, but also women in general, at this time. While her specific circumstances may have been unique, her well-documented life helps shed light on how women negotiated their daily duties and tasks.

## CHAPTER TWO

### “There is no need for them to be learned”: Noblewomen’s Education in the Eighteenth Century

One of the most striking characteristics of Renée-Pélagie de Sade, and one most commented on by Sade biographers, was that her education seemed to have been ignored, neglected even.<sup>1</sup> This oversight in Renée’s childhood was odd for several reasons. Renée’s social class and the wealth of her family meant that, of all girls in France in the eighteenth century, she would have had the greatest opportunity to receive the best education possible. Renée’s mother, La Présidente, had evidently received an impressive education, based on her financial and legal knowledge, the high literary quality of her correspondence, and her effective management of the Montreuil household. Scholars have noted that Renée’s younger sister, Anne-Prospère, wrote like her mother, with an elegant hand and an awareness of literary conventions. Because Renée’s parents had intended for her to secure an advantageous marriage, an investment in Renée meant an investment in the Montreuil family as a whole. And, yet, Renée reached adulthood, married, and became responsible for a provincial household without having received the same educational opportunities as the other women in her family.

The question of why Renée’s parents did not provide her with a more rigorous education to prepare her for her future as a nobleman’s wife has not been resolved. Renée was not a naturally unintelligent woman, but perhaps her simplicity and tomboyish nature led her parents to believe an education would be wasted on her. Or, perhaps La Présidente thought the Montreuil money was enough to secure a marriage for Renée,

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<sup>1</sup>Maurice Lever, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, *Sade: A Biography* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1993), p. 106; Francine du Plessix Gray, *At Home with the Marquis de Sade: A Life* (New York: Penguin Books), p. 52.

without the added time and expense of educating her. As the eldest child of six, Renée spent a significant amount of her time watching over her younger siblings. This lack of free time, as compared to the younger children, might account for why Renée's sister received the better education. Renée may have been an aberration within in her own household, but the same could not have been said when comparing Renée to girls in the eighteenth century overall.

### **Girls and Education in the Eighteenth Century**

Historical studies detailing the educational opportunities presented to noblewomen in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries have proliferated over the past twenty-five years. The noticeable dearth in scholarship on this subject has been and continues to be replaced by both macro and micro-historical accounts of the access to and content of the education afforded women during this time. Much of the scholarship that deals with the education of women and girls, though, makes one of two assumptions that clouds subsequent attempts to understand a woman's strategies of household and estate management. The first assumption comes from the acknowledgement that women in the eighteenth century were not, in most cases, given access to a liberal education but were likely taught "skills," such as basic literacy, sewing, dancing, etc. This leads to the conclusion that "daughters of all strata of society were relegated to learning skills useful around the home."<sup>2</sup> This chapter demonstrates that, despite the fact that society expected girls to marry and become domestic managers, the education available to girls did not

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<sup>2</sup> Martine Sonnet, "A Daughter to Educate," trans. Arthur Goldhammer, pp. 101-131, in Natalie Zemon Davis and Arlette Farge, eds., *A History of Women in the West, vol. III: Renaissance and Enlightenment Paradoxes* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 101.

prepare them for the responsibilities of household management by exposing them to necessary “skills.” Household management required more than basic skills, and the use of the term “relegated” above suggests that the skills necessary to manage a household were inconsequential, which was not the case.

Women in the eighteenth century, especially those of financial means, had better access to education than did their forebears. It became common practice for the daughters of the wealthy middle classes and the nobility to receive some type of education. Therefore, it is easy to assume that a lack of education was not a factor in the lives of women, especially those from elite families. It may have been possible to characterize the education a wealthy girl received as “good,” inasmuch as it covered written, verbal, mathematical, and creative subjects. However, such a characterization was based on a consideration of what possibly could have been taught, not on the quality of instruction, the regularity of instruction, student retention of content, or relevance. Often that which constituted a “good” education did not directly correspond to a useful education. For the most part, the education provided by schools or within households was functionally sub-standard, often producing unprepared mothers, household managers, and future teachers because of inconsistent quality and the absence of subject matter directly relevant to women’s domestic roles. Women of exceptional learning certainly did exist, most notably the *salonnières* of the seventeenth century; however, most of those women were independently educated by expensive professional tutors or turned to self-education as a way of acquiring the skills necessary to function in the highly literate and intellectually demanding society of a *salon*.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Samia I. Spencer, “Women and Education” in Samia I. Spencer, ed., *French Women and the Age of Enlightenment* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 84.

For the purpose of this study, understanding the educational background of noblewomen aids in assessing the skills women possessed when they assumed the responsibility of household and estate management. Despite the fact that managing households and estates was viewed as one of the traditional tasks of women, it proved to be complicated business. Navigating the economic world of eighteenth-century France was no small feat; in addition, household management necessitated written and verbal communication, organizational abilities, facility with basic legal concepts, and a commanding presence in order to manage servants and staff. Interestingly, even though all facets of society expected household and estate management of women, the types of knowledge listed above were, for the most part, seen by educators and philosophers alike as inappropriate and superfluous for women. The select few educators who did advocate for a change in the content of girls' education ultimately failed to achieve any perceptible reform. Because women often lacked the basic skills to fulfill their function as estate and household managers, advisors, be they lawyers, notaries, or particularly skilled members of the household staff, greatly aided noblewomen with their daily duties. While many provincial noblemen spent time away from home at court or in Paris searching for ways to alleviate the reality of their impoverishment, women did not have their better-educated husbands to turn to on a regular basis.

During the "Age of Enlightenment," a time of on-going debates about the nature of women, the place of women in society, and what constituted appropriate social relationships between women and men, women's lack of education concerning one of their primary social functions forced women to forge personal and professional relationships with men other than their husbands. The average noblewoman's

educational background directly affected how and why women turned to these advisors. The following sections in this chapter deal with the works of educational theorists and the reality of schooling girls in the eighteenth century. First, this chapter presents a brief survey how major educational theorists of the early modern period and the eighteenth century conceptualized educating a girl for her eventual role as household and estate manager. Each theorist recognized that many girls would end up with this responsibility; however, the ways that each theorist advocated preparing girls for this differed greatly, depending upon his or her view of the ultimate purpose of household management. Their ideas reveal how the debates surrounding the nature of women, prevalent in the *querelle des femmes*,<sup>4</sup> trickled down to training girls to run households. The last section of this chapter investigates the educational opportunities that were in place to educate girls. It reveals that even a well-educated girl had a great chance of assuming her role as household manager without an adequate education.

### **Maintenon, Fénelon, and Du Bosc: Early Modern Debates**

Early modern educational theorists discussed the issue of household management, and their prescriptions focused on endowing girls with a sense of self-confidence and autonomy, as well as the basic skills necessary to run a household. The three theorists discussed, Jacques Du Bosc, François Fénelon, and Françoise d'Aubigné, the Marquise de Maintenon, represented three distinct, yet complimentary, points of view on how to educate girls in order to produce the most effective household managers. They recognized the complicated nature of household management and recommended that girls

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<sup>4</sup> The *querelle des femmes* refers to the debate over women in European society that began during the medieval period and persisted into the nineteenth century.

were educated specifically for it. They offered an alternative to the traditional educational models used in convent schools and criticized the incompetence of most tutors and nannies. Even though their ideas did not become common practice, they added to the ongoing debates about the nature of women and the most appropriate education for them the recognition that household management was not a simple undertaking.

In his writings on the education of girls, Jacques Du Bosc stressed that the best lesson to teach any girl was how to find happiness and confidence from within. He believed that the essential characteristic of contentment, coupled with practical knowledge, would create the most effective household managers and ensure that women did not become disenchanted with their lives. Though considered to be an educational treatise, Du Bosc's *L'Honneste Femme*, published in 1632, did not include any specific instructions about how women should be educated because he "assumed that his readers were capable of drawing their own conclusions and incorporating them into their lives."<sup>5</sup> The way that he titled *L'Honneste Femme* attested to this; *honneste* meant a combination of wisdom and virtue. Thus, he focused more on behaviors and desirable traits in women than on skills women should possess. He claimed to be interested in cultivating the "internal life" of women. In order to be internally *honneste*, a woman should be pleasant, charming, prudent, and temperate. Du Bosc viewed these traits as essential to happiness, and he thought a happy woman would have the confidence to do whatever was required of her, including interacting with others or learning new skills.

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<sup>5</sup> Collen Fitzgerald, "To Educate or Instruct? DuBosc and Fénelon on Women" in Barbara Whitehead, ed., *Women's Education in Early Modern Europe: A History, 1500-1800* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1999).

The most basic characteristic an education should cultivate in a woman was self-love, according to Du Bosc. As he observed:

Affection commonly follows esteem, and the love we have for any object seems to arise from the knowledge we have of it; so that the love of ourselves depends upon the opinion we conceive of our own merit, and the one is so closely connected with the other. (Chapter I).

He felt that if women were afforded an educational experience that taught them about themselves, “knowledge of themselves would render them more virtuous and better satisfied.”<sup>6</sup> This could help guard against the potential harm caused by a negative self-image because “a contrary opinion [of oneself] serves only to discourage and slacken our endeavors.”<sup>7</sup> A bad opinion of oneself, and the associated lack of confidence, rendered a woman prey to the opinions and suggestions of others, even those who sought to harm or humiliate her. A positive self-image gave women the strength necessary to avoid being taken advantage of by other people. The fear of women being taken advantage of permeated debates on education and household management, as women interacted with staff members, lawyers, notaries, creditors, and debtors, and needed to interact with them as an authority or an equal. A lack of confidence could undermine a woman’s ability to do this. Du Bosc stressed balance, however; an inflated sense of self worth led to harmful consequences, the foremost being a sense of perfection that would cause a woman to reject any attempt at self-improvement. He felt that all humans could improve themselves in some way, but a conceited woman would not be able to see the places for improvement within herself.

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<sup>6</sup> Du Bosc, *L’Honneste Femme*, Chapter I.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*



Even though Du Bosc focused on cultivating the internal life of women, he criticized the prevailing view that women should be cultivated in order to be pleasant. He encouraged women to “consider the duty they owe themselves” when they prepared themselves for society. He said of women destined to enter elite society that “it is nothing to know what they must do to make their conversation agreeable, if they do not know what is required to make their lives happy.”<sup>8</sup> He saw that the *arts d’agrément* held a purpose for women, too, and that was to give them the internal peace and happiness necessary to function not only for society, but also for themselves.<sup>9</sup> A woman who mastered her internal feelings could be happy alone or in the company of others, impervious to loneliness but not anti-social, and able to resist the flattery, lies, and intrigue inherent in elite society. These skills would be useful to a household manager, who needed confidence and a gentle, yet commanding presence, to perform her work.

In contrast to Du Bosc’s focus on internal happiness, François Fénelon’s sought to provide women with practical skills related to household and estate management. Fénelon became interested in the education of girls and women after, in 1687, he was appointed Superior of the Nouvelles Catholiques, a religious community created to facilitate conversion of Huguenots after Louis XIV’s persecutions. Fénelon came to believe in conversion through education rather than violent means.<sup>10</sup> As a result of working with the girls of the Nouvelles Catholiques, Fénelon came to believe that women

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, Chapter VI.

<sup>9</sup> This term refers to skills such as drawing, dancing, and music, which aimed at making women more cultivated and pleasant.

<sup>10</sup> Fénelon, *Traité de l’éducation des filles* in H.C. Barnard, ed., *Fénelon on Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p.xiii.

required education both to become better people and to deal with practical issues, such as property administration.<sup>11</sup>

Fénelon began his *Traité de l'éducation des filles* with the observation that “nothing is more neglected than the education of girls.”<sup>12</sup> Fénelon advocated that girls should learn skills necessary to educating children, supervising servants, tabulating household expenses, and receiving and paying leases and rents.<sup>13</sup> According to him:

It is doubtless necessary to have a much higher and more developed intelligence in order to be instructed in the arts related to estate management, and to be in a position to organize a whole household, which is like a little republic, than to play at cards or gossip about the fashions or be concerned with making pretty little speeches.

He acknowledged that household and estate management represented a serious responsibility and that girls were not being adequately prepared to undertake this responsibility.

Women needed to be able to manage their estates on their own in order to cultivate authority with servants and to avoid being taken advantage of.<sup>14</sup> He connected the reliance on advisors or household staff members to the poor education available to girls. Because women did not possess the skills necessary to run their households on their own, without the input of financial, legal, and other advisors, they unintentionally delegated their authority to these advisors. Fénelon felt this situation could be changed if only girls were taught a version of the skills that the boys who grew up to be their advisors were taught. He realized that while girls could not learn the same expertise as

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. xxxiv.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 75.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 78.

men in the professions, a working knowledge of those concepts most related to household management would assist women in maintaining authority within their households.

Fénelon stressed the practical benefits of literacy and arithmetic and even promoted that women acquired a working knowledge of French law. The reason for this is two-fold. First, estate managers regularly dealt with will, contracts, and the joining of property, so this knowledge was directly relevant to what a woman did nearly every day. Secondly, because lawsuits could be costly and complicated, women should know what legal action entailed so they can endeavor to avoid it when necessary. A woman ignorant of the legal process might be made to think a suit was the most efficient means of dealing with a contested matter, even when this was not the truth. Fénelon feared unscrupulous lawyers would take advantage of women, forcing them into costly legal action when, perhaps, such action was avoidable. A savvy woman who understood basic legal concepts could find more efficient alternatives to solving their problems if given the proper education.

Fénelon believed that household and estate managers should have familiarized themselves with traditional obligations of landed nobility within their communities. A woman like Renée, who lived in an urban area but took control over a rural, provincial household, would not have had the experience necessary to understand rural social relationships and responsibilities. This created the problem Fénelon recognized when it came to reliance on advisors—that frequent consultation of advisors discredited a woman’s authority. In order to maintain convincing control over her household, a woman needed to be able to answer questions and resolve complicated issues. The skills and knowledge advocated by Fénelon would have allowed women to “listen to their men

of business but not put themselves in their power.”<sup>15</sup> Fénelon saw instead that the lack of adequate education available to girls created women who existed at the mercy of their male advisors.

Du Bosc’s and Fénelon’s ideas did not inform the majority of educational practices in the early modern period, but one school for girls operated according to Fénelon’s standards—Madame de Maintenon’s Maison Royale de St. Louis à St. Cyr. The mistress turned secret wife of the king obtained a royal charter to found a boarding school for the daughters of military officers and poor nobles. The school opened in 1686. St. Cyr was a secular school based on the model of many convent schools. One key difference, however, stemmed from Maintenon’s friendship with Fénelon. As a woman in charge of the education of girls, Maintenon desired to actually prepare girls to live the life of a mother and household manager.<sup>16</sup> A character in one of the plays Maintenon wrote for students to perform as an educational exercise (an innovative technique for teaching girls) described the role of a nobleman’s wife as one where:

A devoted wife rises early in the morning to have more time. She starts with prayer. She gives her orders to the servants. She takes care of her children and is involved in their education...She is the premier servant for making sure that everything is properly prepared...She writes to merchants. She rarely goes out.<sup>17</sup>

Maintenon recognized the responsibilities associated with household management, and she strove to prepare her students for interacting with household staff, overseeing the education of her children, and overseeing the purchase of household provisions. Her

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 85.

<sup>16</sup> H.C. Barnard, *Girls at School Under the Ancien Regime* (London: Burns and Oates, 1954), p. 50.

<sup>17</sup> From “*Sur l’éducation et sur l’avantage d’être élevé un peu durement* (trans. “On Education and On the Advantages of a Demanding Upbringing”) in John J. Conley, ed. and trans, *Madame de Maintenon: Dialogues and Addresses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 64.

school emphasized literacy, mathematics, legal knowledge, and communication skills, along with manners and civility, because of this recognition. She observed that girls were not being prepared for lives as the wives of noblemen because their education consisted of learning manners but not in obtaining knowledge necessary to the day-to-day running of a household. Maintenon's opinions on education made her a unique figure during this time, as she recognized the benefits of an education for a woman destined to be an estate and household manager. While cultivating a pleasant manner, extolling virtue, and pleasing one's husband in all things certainly were components of Maintenon's educational philosophy, she recognized that that an education based solely on those principles did not assist girls once they left school. Despite her keen recognition of this fact, most girls during the eighteenth century, if they received any education at all, received the type of education that Madame de Maintenon spent her professional teaching career criticizing.

A curriculum based on Fénelon's recommendations, as well as innovative pedagogical techniques such as discussion groups, aided in Maintenon's goal of differentiating St. Cyr from other education institutions. While the curriculum at St. Cyr may have been rigorous for these daughters of the impoverished nobility, Maintenon felt the end result of being a virtuous, Christian wife with practical skills necessary to household management would prove profitable in the end. In one of her many addresses presented to the students, Maintenon reminded the girls in the *classe verte* (ages eleven to fourteen) of why they should treasure the demanding educational opportunities afforded them. Titled "*Sur l'éducation et sur l'avantage d'être élevé un peu durement,*" the address asked the girls to:

Imagine for a minute that you found yourself in the usual state of young ladies in your condition. Your mother would have at least two chambermaids, one of whom would be your governess. What sort of education do you think such a girl would give you? Usually they are peasant girls or, at best, members of the minor bourgeoisie. They only know how to stand up straight, how to lace a corset, and how to make a good curtsy...I remember that when I lived with my aunt, one of the chambermaids took care of me. She was always correcting me and telling me to stand up straight. But for everything else, she just let me do what I wanted.<sup>18</sup>

In reality, St. Cyr struggled to employ teachers who were sufficiently educated and interested in instructing girls. Enrollment and the quality of education began to decline during the eighteenth-century.<sup>19</sup> Although an innovative approach to the education of girls, St. Cyr did not change the way most girls were educated in the eighteenth-century. Noblewomen who supervised households and estate were beholden to their advisors, a situation Fénelon had attempted to prevent.

Neither Fénelon nor Maintenon has received much attention in modern scholarship, even that on education, though they represent two important theorists on the subject. One possible explanation for this is that, while their views on the education of girls can be interpreted as innovative for their time period, they were both socially conservative and extremely pious individuals. It can be frustrating for a modern scholar to read Fénelon's views on a woman's right to understand law or Maintenon's innovative pedagogical techniques, only to find that both held the ultimate goal of producing good Christian mothers and wives. Surely both Fénelon and Madame de Maintenon would have agreed with the sentiment that "reading, grammar, writing, and the other subjects would mean little if they did not help us to make our pupils better [people] and above all,

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<sup>18</sup> From "*Sur les inconvénients du mariage*" in Conley, p. 130.

<sup>19</sup> Phyllis Stock, *Better than Rubies: A History of Women's Education* (New York: G.P. Putnam and Sons, 1978), p. 96.

true Christians.”<sup>20</sup> Perhaps feminist scholars balked at the idea of an education that promoted strict Catholicism and duty to husband and children for a woman. To modern minds, an education should be a tool for liberation. While it is true that neither Fénelon nor Maintenon were revolutionaries on the subject of women in society, they both took a crucial step with their desire to ensure that a woman was adequately prepared to function within the role accorded her by society. This meant women would not be subject to the superior knowledge of their husbands, advisors, and male children and could thus competently, even expertly, direct their own lives. As it was, most women received an education of inadequate depth and breadth before assuming directorship of their households.

Du Bosc, as well, has not received much scholarly attention. He, like Fénelon, was a member of the clergy, as in this period the Church held a premium on education. Du Bosc perhaps suffered from the opposite problem than did Fénelon or Maintenon—his educational philosophy was so non-specific and took for granted that a woman had the time, energy, and resources necessary to focus on the cultivation of the mind and soul. He did not describe the step-by-step means by which a woman was to achieve inner happiness (whereas Fénelon gave specific pedagogical instructions and Maintenon carried them out). Colleen Fitzgerald was one of the first scholars to treat Du Bosc as an explicitly educational theorist. This has possibly led to the lack of recognition of his contributions to the theories surrounding the purpose of a girl’s education.

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<sup>20</sup> Anne de Xianctonge, in Poutet, “Spiritualité des enseignements,” in Elizabeth Rapley, *The Dévotes: Women and Church in Seventeenth-Century France* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1990), p. 155.

Girls destined to be household managers would have benefited from either Du Bosc's or the Fénelon/Maintenon model, as they strove to help girls develop a sense of self, individuality, and confidence, as well as the practical skills necessary to complete tasks, such as the financial and legal issues surrounding household and estate management. An ideal combination of both models of educational philosophy would have best primed girls for their future roles. However, in the eighteenth century, the educational schemas available accomplished neither goal. Convent schools did not teach girls to write in the manner that Du Bosc or Fénelon advocated. Tracing and reciting scripture gave girls neither the ability of self-reflection nor the practical reading, writing, and critical thinking skills necessary to household management. Very few avenues existed for girls to learn the basic legal knowledge that Fénelon viewed as critically necessary to running a household or managing an estate. Most girls educated in the eighteenth century received inadequate training at odds with the roles society expected them to undertake as adults.

### **Eighteenth-Century Debates**

The discussion of a proper education for girls and women did not end in the early modern period but persisted into the eighteenth century. Often seen as an extension of the *querelle des femmes*, the debate over the substance of female education characterized eighteenth-century intellectual debates. The influence of *salonnières* in the seventeenth century and the development of so-called *précieuses*<sup>21</sup> concerned intellectuals and society

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<sup>21</sup> This word began as a pejorative term but came to also be used as a general term for educated women who partook in polite society and *salon* culture.



as a whole.<sup>22</sup> While Du Bosc and Fénelon advocated for education as a means for women to assert their authority and find happiness, eighteenth century *querelle des femmes*-style debates instead focused on society and the potential negative impacts that *salon* women could have on society, if an educational system that continued to produce them persisted. Inevitably, these debates on the education of women touched upon the topic of household management. The following section highlights three major Enlightenment era sources on education—the *Encyclopédie*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Louise d'Épinay—and extracts specifically how they viewed the relationship between education and household management. Overall, all three sources advocated for what they thought would create the most effective household managers. However, their definitions of “effective” differed to the extent that the type of education they advocated varied significantly.

The *Encyclopédie*, created to serve as the ultimate expression of eighteenth-century French intellectual thought and values, did not mention sex-specific education in its entry for “*éducation*.” The article did not outline separate types of instruction or appropriate topics for boys and girls. The entry either spoke generally about education, with no reference to sex, or dealt specifically with educating boys. Girls were excluded from the very beginning, when the entry enumerated the three purposes of educating a

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<sup>22</sup> See Carolyn Lougee, *Le Paradis des Femmes: Women, Salons, and Social Stratification in Seventeenth-Century France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976). Lougee discusses how the role of women in salons brought up two sources of concern—questions about women in general and questions about changes in society. Because salons were viewed as extensions of the court, they represented the “extension of culture of polite society to...persons outside the traditional nobility” such as venal officeholders and the middle class (p. 5). While the nature and place of women in society was certainly a cause for concern, more was at stake than just that issue when it came to educating women. Thus one’s stance on the nature of women often correlated to his stance on the inclusion or exclusion of the *noblesse de robe* in traditional noble and court society.

child. The three goals of education given are to: develop good health and bodily confirmation, nourish the spirit, and give children the skills necessary to succeed in everyday life. Even though this entry relied on general terms, one of the proposed goals of education was to prepare children for their eventual roles in society by teaching them both the requisite knowledge for their future roles and about how to conduct oneself according to one's station. The examples given are that the children of nobles, of magistrates, and of rural dwellers would all be educated differently, the inference being that these children will eventually end up taking life paths similar to those of their parents. Therefore, while a girl destined to become the wife of a nobleman and the manager of his household and properties would need to know the things necessary to undertake this, the *Encyclopédie* did not expand upon what those things would be or how they would be taught to girls.

The pedagogical technique examples presented in this encyclopedia entry excluded the potential for girls to receive any kind of formal education. One such example instructed teachers to introduce new concepts gradually by building on pre-existing knowledge. For instance, in mathematics, before introducing the concept of multiples of ten, an instructor first must determine if the pupil grasps the concept of one. An instructor can show the relationship between one and multiples by making an analogy between a single soldier and an entire army. In this way, the student understands that an entire army is comprised of many single soldiers, just as the number ten is comprised of many (ten) ones. Several armies together can represent multiples of ten, and so on. Obviously, this pedagogical trick was geared towards teaching boys. The *Encyclopédie*

entry on education implied that boys were the ones who needed educational lessons in order to properly participate in society as adults.<sup>23</sup>

Several *Encyclopédie* entries on the subject of “woman” briefly mention a woman’s education, but none of them give much specific consideration to the content and purpose of educating girls. The entry for “Woman (Ethics)” acknowledged that the education a woman could receive in eighteenth-century France “is as bad as it is general and more neglected than useful.” However, the author did not touch upon how to ameliorate this situation. He mentioned, though that “praise of the character or mind of a woman is almost always proof of her ugliness.” This line of reasoning suggested that an educated woman would be an unattractive mate for a man. The idea that learning rendered a woman unattractive to men, and thus made her unable to be married was a common theme in the critique of educating women. Also, the stereotype that learning either made women ugly, or that ugly women were naturally more attracted to learning in order to try to mask their physical inadequacies, was commonly called upon to argue against educating girls. The potential of creating a country of scholarly, physically unappealing, and unmarried women was both embarrassing and dangerous, as the end of marriage and child-bearing meant the decline and eventual death of society. This fear seemed to trump the utility of educating girls in proper household and estate management techniques.

The few learned women mentioned in “Women (Jurisprudence),” were either the few exceptional women who were able to attend and graduate from European universities

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<sup>23</sup> All references to *Encyclopédie* articles have been taken from: *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, ed. Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond D'Alembert. University of Chicago: ARTFL Encyclopédie Projet (Winter 2008 Edition), Robert Morrissey (ed), <http://encyclopedia.uchicago.edu/>.

or who populated the standard list of quasi- and completely fictional learned women of classical antiquity. Looking to these women as examples of educated women is not particularly helpful, as they either did not exist, lived privileged lives, or were given extraordinary opportunities to pursue scholarly studies. The practical type of education needed by the average eighteenth-century estate manager is never mentioned, nor is it even suggested that an education might benefit women when it comes to performing their everyday duties, save for the “Ethics” quote above that vaguely suggests that the education of girls was lacking. The *Encyclopédie* is well-known for the breadth of topics it discusses; yet, while the authors of this work concerned themselves with everything from history, to architecture, to how to use a bathtub, the education of girls and women was not a topic they deemed worthy of much serious discussion.

### Rousseau and d'Épinay : A Comparison of Educational Theories

One of the most famous and popular eighteenth-century philosophical works on the education of children, both boys and girls, remains Rousseau's *Emile*.<sup>24</sup> In *Emile*, Rousseau explored a new way of organizing the education of children in order to produce

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<sup>24</sup> For major and recent works on women and education in *Emile*, see: John Darling and Maaïke van de Pijpekamp, “Rousseau on the Education, Domination, and Violation of Women,” in *British Journal of Educational Studies*, vol. 42, no. 2 (Jun., 1994), pp. 115-132; Nicole Fermon, “Domesticating Women, Civilizing Men,” in *The Sociological Quarterly*, vol. 35, no. 3 (Aug. 1994), pp. 431-442; Sarah Kofman, *Le Respect des Femmes: Kant et Rousseau* (Paris: Galilée, 1981); Lori Jo Marso, *(Un)Manly Citizens: Jean-Jacques Rousseau's and Germaine de Staël's Subversive Women* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Susan Moller Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979); William Ray, “Reading Women: Cultural Authority, Gender, and the Novel. The Case of Rousseau,” in *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 27, no. 3 (Spring, 1994), pp. 421-447; Denise Schaeffer, “Reconsidering the Role of Sophie in Rousseau's *Emile*,” in *Polity* vol. 30, no.4 (Summer 1998), pp. 607-626; Mary Trouille, “The Failings of Rousseau's Ideals of Domesticity and Sensibility,” in *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 4, no. 4 (Summer, 1991), pp. 451-483; Penny A. Weiss, “Sex, Freedom, & Equality in Rousseau's *Emile*,” in *Polity*, vol. 22, no. 4 (Summer 1990), pp. 603-625.

happy, productive, and morally responsible citizens. He believed that a woman's role in the household was to manage domestic affairs and take care of the children, and he added in the element of seeing to her husband's emotional happiness. Whereas Du Bosc concerned himself with the inner happiness of the woman, Rousseau believed that a woman should be educated towards the most important aspect of household management, which was managing her husband's feeling of contentment.

Rousseau dedicated most of the work to the education received by the boy, Emile. Under the supervision of a scholarly and manipulative tutor, Emile first learned to suppress his imagination and desires. Rousseau believed that young children should not be encouraged to use their imaginations, as doing so strengthens their passions and desires. Rousseau was especially concerned with retarding the development of *amour propre*, or the desire to be held in esteem by others in society. Whereas "savages" who lived outside of the realm of civilized society only cared for themselves, for their self-preservation, men who lived within the constraints of society cared not only for themselves, but about what others thought of them. The drive to please others, to be held in high esteem, can easily become an obsession that damages one's ability to morally participate in society. It most often leads to unhappiness, as society can be a cruel place and no one can possibly be held in the highest esteem by everyone always. Because of this, Rousseau advocated holding off on the development of such feelings for as long as possible. He recognized, though, that the development of abstract thinking and feelings such as *amour propre* were inevitable.

When imaginations and desires began to swell in the young pupil's mind, Emile was discouraged from being driven by those desires and letting them fester out of control.

Under proper instruction, desires could be funneled into what Rousseau considered to be more healthy outlets. The ultimate goal was for a boy to channel these desires towards his mate. Emile's tutor introduced him to such concepts in small steps by, for instance, providing Emile a pet in order for him to "practice" loving something outside of himself before he met his future wife.

Because the ultimate goal of marriage was so important to Rousseau, the character of Sophie, Emile's future wife, received some detailed treatment in Rousseau's work. Book V is dedicated to the description of the ideal education of girls, an education that would compliment that of boys and would prepare girls to be wives and mothers, which Rousseau saw as a societal necessity. For Rousseau, the purpose of educating girls was to teach them how to control the desires of men, the desires that led to unhappiness. The proper functioning of society depended upon women ensuring the happiness of men by knowing how to control, divert, and suppress the destructive desires of their husbands. For instance, by knowing how to appropriately compliment her husband, a woman could effectively sate her husband's *amour propre* so that he did not need to look to others outside of his private household in order to feel appreciated. The combination of a relatively underdeveloped sense of desire in a man (due to his early education of suppressing such desires) and a woman educated specifically to understand how to control a man's desires would lead to happy citizens who are able to concentrate on moral contributions to society, according to Rousseau.

Sophie's education was geared towards teaching her about men so that she would grow up to be an expert on men's motivations and desires. Girls in Rousseau's ideal world would be taught to identify virtue and morality, and about the power associated

with beauty. They would also learn about the psychological make-up of men. For instance, Sophie read Fénelon's *Les Aventures de Télémaque*, a story of Fénelon's creation that dealt with Telemachus's experiences as he left Ithaca in search of his father. Fénelon created this story to be an educational text, as it touched on themes of loyalty, virtue, politics, and religion. He intended it to be a work that paid homage to western civilization, as the story continued Homer's epic cycle on the Trojan War.<sup>25</sup> On the surface, then, it seemed rather forward-thinking on Rousseau's part that he suggested such a text be read by a girl, especially in light of the controversy surrounding the reading of fictional texts by girls and women. But, what Sophie learned from reading this text was that Telemachus is the kind of man she should want to marry. Sophie fell "in love with Telemachus, and loved him with a passion no one could cure." The character of a virtuous, family-oriented, loyal man presented Sophie with an appropriate model of what to look for in a husband. In addition to providing a template for an ideal husband, this work gave Sophie insight into what motivated a man such as Telemachus, what a man like him valued. Sophie could then internalize this information in order to start manipulating the desires of her real-life Telemachus when she eventually found him. Upon meeting Emile (a meeting arranged by Emile's tutor, as he had already identified Sophie as Emile's future mate), Sophie recognized the positive male traits in Emile that she had learned about during the course of her education.

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<sup>25</sup> It has also been suggested that this text influenced Rousseau's entire conception of a child's education, as presented in *Emile*. Throughout his journeys, Telemachus is guided by a character known as Tutor, who helps Telemachus analyze and take meaning from each of his experiences. It is revealed that Tutor is actually the Goddess of Wisdom, Minerva, in disguise. Perhaps this relationship inspired the characterization of Emile's tutor, who possesses knowledge hidden from Emile and manipulates Emile's fate in ways similar to that of the Gods in ancient literary works.

Aside from his detailed discussion of what a girl needed to learn to guarantee the happiness of her husband, Rousseau was silent in discussing the other skills necessary to run a happy and functional home. According to Rousseau, a woman's job as household manager was to provide emotional comfort and stability to her husband. While controlling a man's *amour propre* might help with his emotional happiness, living in a chaotic, disorganized, financially ruined household surely would cause some unhappiness to creep into a marriage. This void did not go unnoticed by some of Rousseau's contemporaries, most notably Madame d'Épinay. She criticized Rousseau's work for lacking practical details because he did not have any idea what it is like to be a woman.

Louise d'Épinay was a well-known eighteenth-century patron of the arts and close friend of many of the *philosophes*, including Diderot, d'Holbach, Grimm, and for a time Rousseau.<sup>26</sup> In addition, she was a writer in her own right, publishing such works as the semi-autobiographical novel *Les Contre-Confessions* and *Conversations d'Emilie*<sup>27</sup>, a partial response to Rousseau's characterization of girls and education in *Emile*.<sup>28</sup> In 1783, she won a prize from the Académie Française for an educational treatise she wrote

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<sup>26</sup> Rousseau and d'Épinay were close friends at the beginning of Rousseau's career. She became a patron of Rousseau, and the cottage where he spent two years writing in comfortable seclusion, l'Ermitage, was owned by d'Épinay and was located on her estate. Their relationship began to deteriorate as Rousseau became more famous. She blamed Rousseau's moodiness and instability; he accused her of trying to trap him into her patronage because of his celebrity. By the end of his life, Rousseau had fallen out of touch with many of his close friends, the most notable in addition to d'Épinay being David Hume.

<sup>27</sup> *Les Contre-Confessions* is generally understood to be a fictionalized version of d'Épinay's life, with the main character, Madame de Montbrillant representing d'Épinay. It tells the story of an unhappily married woman, her various liaisons with famous philosophers, and her feelings of failure as a wife and mother. D'Épinay's real-life marriage ended with her initiating a formal separation from her husband in 1749. *Conversations d'Emilie* was inspired by d'Épinay's granddaughter, who lived with her for thirteen years.

<sup>28</sup> For a discussion of d'Épinay's works in relation to those of Rousseau, see Mary Trouille, "La Femme Mal Mariée: Mme d'Épinay's Challenge to *Julie* and *Emile*," in *Eighteenth-Century Life* 20.1 (1996), pp. 42-66.



on the education of girls. D'Épinay heartily disagreed with Rousseau's conception of a woman's role in society as the gatekeeper of men's happiness and with the type of education he advocated for girls in order to secure this role. D'Épinay advocated that girls received the same education as boys, an education that resulted in feelings of independence and self-esteem. Girls should be taught critical reasoning as well as practical skills. However, despite her stance that Rousseau's scheme was detrimental to the happiness of women, d'Épinay's ultimate goal was to foster happiness within girls and women by "balanc[ing] this sense of inner freedom and critical judgment with respect for social roles and conventions."<sup>29</sup> She believed that mothers should take an active role in the education of their children, sons and daughters alike.<sup>30</sup> For d'Épinay, a well-rounded education for girls would lead to happy, healthy women who could manage their households with ease.

*Les Contre-Confessions* has been characterized as a "survival guide" for eighteenth-century women who wished to take control of their own lives, especially the aspect involving raising and educating their children, but who lacked a sufficient education and supportive husband necessary to achieve this.<sup>31</sup> D'Épinay criticized

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p. 58.

<sup>30</sup> For major and recent works on d'Épinay's views on women and education, see: Elisabeth Badinter, *Emilie, Emilie: L'ambition féminine aux XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Flammarion, 1984); Sissela Bok, "The Contested Self-Portrait of Madame d'Épinay," in *Ploughshares*, vol. 10, no. 2/3 (1984), pp. 166-178; Odette David, *L'autobiographie de convenance de Madame d'Épinay: écrivain-philosophe des Lumières: subversion idéologique et formelle de l'écriture de soi* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007); Alice Parker, "Louise d'Épinay's Account of Female Epistemology and Sexual Politics," in *The French Review*, vol. 55, no. 1 (Oct., 1981), pp. 43-51; Leon Schwartz, "F.M. Grimm and the Eighteenth-Century Debate on Women," in *The French Review*, vol. 58, no. 2 (Dec., 1984), pp. 236-243; Mary Trouille, "La Femme Mal Mariée: Mme d'Épinay's Challenge to *Julie* and *Emile*," in *Eighteenth-Century Life* 20.1 (1996), 42-66; Ruth Plaut Weinreb, *Eagle in a Gauze Cage: Louise d'Épinay, femme des lettres* (New York: AMS Press, 1993).

<sup>31</sup> Trouille, p. 48.

Rousseau for idealizing the lives of women and for having no experience with the daily experience of being a woman. Rousseau assumed that women would be happy and content with their lives as wives and mothers. D'Épinay's real life, and the one she portrayed in her novel, demonstrated that women often had ambivalent feelings about their domestic lives. Madame de Monbrillant, the character based on d'Épinay herself, lived with a cold, uninterested, and philandering husband. While she tried to live by Rousseau's recommendation of supporting her husband, she found that she felt a desire to be loved and appreciated by someone outside of herself. Realizing that her husband would not fulfill this role, she turned to her children for a sense of happiness and purpose. D'Épinay documented her character's realization that even though she loved her children, the love of a child could not replace the love of a husband. In addition, social forces seemed to conflict with her desire to bond with her children. For example, Madame de Montbrillant's mother and husband both balked at the idea of her breastfeeding her son. When Montbrillant tried to assert herself in choosing a tutor for her son and daughter, her husband intervened. Montbrillant concluded that much of her impotence in her own life stemmed from her lack of education and self-esteem. In order to avoid this in her children, she wished to give her daughter a more well-rounded education with an emphasis not only on the *arts d'agrément* but also on those topics that lead to independent and abstract thinking. Montbrillant's husband, finding this scheme inappropriate, demanded that the more "traditional" tutors he chose educate his children. D'Épinay asserted that a lack of adequate education, which led to a feeling of helplessness for women, was a main cause of unhappiness in the lives of women.

*Les Conversations d'Emilie* dealt directly with how the education of girls should be conducted. It also laid out d'Épinay's criticisms of Rousseau's discussion of Sophie's ideal education in *Emile*. D'Épinay recounted how Emilie was taught to read and write at a young age, much younger than Sophie. Emilie, the main female character in d'Épinay's work, was also exposed to a broad range of subjects throughout the course of her education. D'Épinay emphasized that the goal of Emilie's education was to teach her self-sufficiency and how to have control over important choices in her own life. For example, one evening, d'Épinay's character came home to have Emilie admit that she had ignored her studies in favor of playing games. Despite the best attempts by her nursemaid, Emilie refused to see to her schoolwork. Emilie admitted this shamefully, but d'Épinay's character responded with understanding, as she believed balance led to happiness. She proceeded to recount to Emilie the tale of "La Fille Amazone," a story in which the father of an unruly young girl took over her education after tutors declared her a lost cause. Her father announced that his daughter's sedentary lifestyle was to blame for her bad temper and frequent tantrums, so he coupled her study with vigorous physical education to train both the mind and the body. She engaged in "masculine activities like hunting and shooting." According to d'Épinay, "combined with her beauty, talents, and charms, these traits made her one of the most attractive persons of her sex."<sup>32</sup> D'Épinay ceded that the Amazon girl was a special case and Emilie was neither as brilliant nor as high strung as the Amazon girl, but Emilie could learn that balancing schoolwork with playing and physical activities, like her dance lessons, would benefit her. Allowing

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<sup>32</sup> Louise d'Épinay, *Les Conversations d'Emilie*, in Anne R. Larson and Colette H. Winn, eds., *Writings by Pre-Revolutionary French Women: From Marie de France to Elizabeth Vigée-Le Brun* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 2000), p. 528.

Emilie to play and dance made her happy, and a happy Emilie would make the best future wife, mother, and household manager.

D'Épinay criticized Rousseau's plan for Sophie's education in several fundamental ways.<sup>33</sup> Firstly, she criticized Rousseau's writing style as abstract, condescending, and boring. She questioned whether anyone besides philosophers would actually be willing or able to read his book. Surely some of her invective was inspired by their bitter quarrel. However, she made the point that Rousseau's book was not written in a style accessible to most mothers concerned with educating their children. She implied that Rousseau was not really concerned with helping mothers find the best way to educate their children, whereas her book was specifically designed for mothers and was written in an engaging and conversational style. D'Épinay also pointed out the vague nature of Rousseau's description of Sophie's preparation to be a wife and mother. While he acknowledged that Sophie would learn domestic skills, he did not elaborate on what that meant or how these were to be learned. His mainly focused, of course, on how Sophie's education related to Emile's emotional happiness. What skills Rousseau viewed as necessary for household management, and how a girl was supposed to learn them, he left to the imagination of the reader. D'Épinay declared that her formula of a well-rounded education, coupled with learning from observing a mother, was more specific and useful in a real-world context. Another of her criticisms of Rousseau hinged on the fact that his theoretical precepts were not useful in everyday life. Emile's and Sophie's educations were experiments that not every parent and child could carry out. D'Épinay questioned what use an educational treatise could have if it were impossible to follow its directives.

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<sup>33</sup> Trouille, p. 57-58.

D'Épinay's most comprehensive criticism of *Emile* related to one of the major themes in her story of Madame de Montbrillant; the education girls received forced them to be too dependent on others, which led to unhappiness and despair. D'Épinay experienced this in her own life and started to overcome it by separating from her dismissive and emotionally detached husband, taking a more active role in the lives of her children, and becoming involved intellectually and personally with many of the most prominent *philosophes*. In *Conversations d'Emilie*, d'Épinay made it clear she “was not interested in raising a Sophie, whose main purpose in life was to please her husband and to submit to his whims, but rather an intelligent, autonomous woman capable of finding happiness and fulfillment in herself.”<sup>34</sup> Her analysis of why girls received inferior educations was that “men stand too much to lose” if women were to become their intellectual equals. Even though she so harshly criticized the educational options available to girls during her time, d'Épinay did not intend for girls who received an education like the one she advocated for Emilie to step outside of accepted social roles and boundaries. One way d'Épinay saw to foster a sense of happiness in girls and women was to teach them not only academic subjects, but also to respect social norms and customs. In the end, even though she and Rousseau disagreed fundamentally on how and why to educate girls, the result of both philosophies was the same—that it is good for society for women to be wives and mothers. The main difference between these two writers was how to instill that sense of happiness in daughters, wives, and mothers.

This section has reviewed the ideas major educational theorists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries held on the topic of girls, education, and household and estate

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<sup>34</sup> Trouille, p. 58.

management. Even though these theorists did not agree on the definition of successful management and on the best way to educate girls, the fact that they spent time dwelling upon this subject indicates a recognition that not all was well in the realm of educating girls. No one could agree on how or why, but clearly the education available to girls had fallen short in the eyes of many observers. The concern about the education of girls stemmed from the realization that it had an effect on society. By their own methods, educational theorists attempted to articulate plans that would impact families and society as a whole more effectively than what was being practiced on the ground. The next section details the actual practice of educating girls in the eighteenth century and shows the striking gap between theory and practice. Whatever theorists thought girls should be learning, chances were, they were not learning it at school. This resulted in household and estate managers who had not been practically prepared for their duties, duties that were considered to be of great social significance.

### **Educating Girls in the Early Modern Period**

Schools of various kinds proliferated in seventeenth and eighteenth-century France. The traditional explanation for this trend has been linked to France's experiences with a visible Protestant population, the Catholic Reformation, and the struggle of the Wars of Religion.<sup>35</sup> The success of Protestant communities and of the aims of the Catholic Reformation rested on using education as a tool to regulate thoughts and

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<sup>35</sup> Schools also opened for girls outside of France at this time. The French government, in order to establish a viable colony in Louisiana, needed to recruit women to America. The goal was to create a settler colony, like the British did in North America. One incentive for women to travel to Louisiana was the promise of a free education in the Ursuline schools that had been opened in the colony. See Clark Robenstine, "French Colonial Policy and the Education of Women and Minorities: Louisiana in the Early Eighteenth Century" in *History of Education Quarterly*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (Summer, 1992), pp. 193-211.

behaviors.<sup>36</sup> Much of the missionary zeal seen during the Catholic Reformation came from the idea that France was engaged in a “spiritual war.”<sup>37</sup> This purpose put a focus not just on the education of men and boys but also on that of women and girls. While girls did not receive the same quality of education as boys, by the eighteenth century girls had, while still meager, an increased opportunity to attend school and receive some type of education. A study of schools in eighteenth-century Paris demonstrated that by the 1750s, nearly 250 schools for girls existed in the capital city alone.<sup>38</sup> These schools could be anything from clandestine attic and apartment schools to State and Church-sanctioned parish, boarding, or day schools. Along with the institutions, between thirty and forty teaching orders of and for women existed by this time.<sup>39</sup> These orders patterned themselves after the Ursulines, who first appeared in France around 1586. The Ursulines developed schools for girls modeled off the Jesuit example.<sup>40</sup> Teaching orders run by non-cloistered women appeared during the seventeenth century. These *filles séculières*, such as the Filles de Notre-Dame, formed in order to ensure that the educational opportunities afforded by the cloistered teaching orders could reach beyond the convent.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> The priest and educational philosopher François Fénelon, was one of the main proponents of using education (especially of women) as a conversion tool and as a way of ensuring the proper Catholic practices.

<sup>37</sup> Elizabeth Rapley, *The Dévotes: Women and Church in Seventeenth-Century France* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1990), p. 192.

<sup>38</sup> Martine Sonnet, *L’éducation des filles au temps des Lumières* (Paris: Les Éditions du CERF, 1987), p. 198.

<sup>39</sup> H.C. Barnard, *Girls at School Under the Ancien Regime* (London: Burns and Oates, 1954), p. 36.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, p. 41.

<sup>41</sup> Rapley, p. 192.

Education was obtained more easily by nobility or the urban middle class, both because of location and costs, and because these classes could hire private tutors to prepare girls for and to supplement school education.<sup>42</sup> On average in 1750, it cost between 400 and 500 *livres* a year to send a girl to a Parisian boarding school. Adding in personal items and supplemental private tutors, the total could come to about 1,000 *livres* per year. To put this amount into perspective, that is about two-thirds the yearly income of a skilled urban craftsman.<sup>43</sup> Schools often offered lessons with “external masters” to tutor girls beyond the basics. Parents paid up to one-half of the total monthly school pension per tutor.<sup>44</sup> Parents who provided their daughters with two tutors paid double the monthly pension; three tutors or more cost more than attending the school. As Voltaire quipped “...one cannot be learned without money.”<sup>45</sup> A girl’s access to education increased greatly if she had an educated family member (especially a mother) to school her at home, in addition to the time she spent in school.<sup>46</sup> Typically, wealthier girls boarded at convent boarding schools; day schools were available for poorer girls who could not afford room and board.

For the most part, a girl’s education in the eighteenth century sought to achieve at least one of three goals: to stamp out heresy, to develop moral characteristics of future wives and mothers, or to cultivate the *arts d’agrément*. Adam Smith remarked that

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<sup>42</sup> Many local parishes did, however, institute free day-schools for poorer children. See Barnard, *Girls at School*, p. 48.

<sup>43</sup> Martine Sonnet, “A Daughter to Educate,” p. 114.

<sup>44</sup> Dena Goodman, *Becoming a Woman in the Age of Letters* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2009), p. 75.

<sup>45</sup> Quoted in Judith P. Zinsser, *Emilie Du Châtelet: Daring Genius of the Enlightenment* (New York: Penguin, 2006).

<sup>46</sup> Spencer, p. 87.



nations prospered when the education of women “tends to some useful purpose” like creating responsible mothers or “improv[ing] the natural attractions of their person.”<sup>47</sup> Despite the influence of exceptionally educated women in French society, the “average” educational experience of girls in the eighteenth-century was rather simplistic.

The content of the education most widely available to women was “predominantly a moral education, based on some knowledge of reading, and occasionally enriched by vocational training [to develop] the moral character of wives and mothers.”<sup>48</sup> A thorough comprehension of religion and proper religious obligations, as well as conversation, needlework, and occasionally very basic reading skills would be stressed. The first women to be educated were noblewomen, so honing their skills at being pleasant, agreeable, and moral mothers was deemed appropriate by society. More daughters of venal nobles or the middle classes attended school throughout the eighteenth century, as it became common for these classes to mimic the lifestyle of traditional nobles.<sup>49</sup> Long-standing intellectual debates had come to the conclusion that women were, by nature, verbal, in contrast to the literacy of men. Due to this stereotype, conversation was seen as an innate talent of women. Education served to make sure women could use their natural abilities at conversing without speaking inappropriately, unintelligibly, or without rambling. Because of this, only basic reading and writing skills composed a woman’s education. Reading was seen as particularly dangerous, as novels could lead women to daydream, confuse fantasy with reality, or endow them with a sense

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<sup>47</sup> Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* in Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (New York: WW Norton and Company, 1986), p. 25.

<sup>48</sup> Stock, p. 80.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, p. 82.

of curiosity, courage, and adventure, thus fashioning more *précieuses*. In the opinion of most educationalists and philosophers, women needed only be able to read scripture. If women learned to write at all, it was mostly by tracing religious texts.<sup>50</sup> This resulted in the illiteracy of even some women who attended school or worked with tutors.<sup>51</sup> In reality, many middle class and noblewomen who managed estates and households had to exist in a very literate world, where reading and writing were skills essential to the survival of the household and estate. Some schools instructed girls in basic arithmetic to aid in keeping a household.<sup>52</sup> However, these math skills did not provide women the ability to keep track of the large-scale expenditures of an estate. Both the tax and debt/credit networks in the Old Regime were extremely complicated and irregular, and composed an important aspect of estate management. Those girls who obtained an education did not benefit from it when it came to their responsibilities as adult women.

Ostensibly, boarding schools and convent schools, which were sponsored mostly by the Church, served to formally educate girls. Obviously, the curriculum of these schools centered on religion, and those skills that were taught, such as reading and writing, were done so by reading and copying scripture and prayers. Girls were instructed by nuns, women who had taken vows to abstain from living the kinds of lives

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<sup>50</sup> Barnard, *Girls at School*, p. 45.

<sup>51</sup> Barbara Whitehead, ed., *Women's Education in Early Modern Europe: A History, 1500-1800* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1999), p. x. Finding a reliable percentage of illiteracy among women is difficult for this period. Whitehead quotes a statistic of up to 90% but does not indicate the source of her number nor what qualifications she uses to determine "literacy." It is doubtful that by the eighteenth century 90% of women were completely illiterate. Certainly levels of literacy varied among women. Naturally, elite women would have a greater chance of being officially educated, but this does not necessarily correlate to one's ability to read and write. Also, basic reading and writing skills do not suffice to render a woman literate enough to effectively manage an estate without outside assistance.

<sup>52</sup> Barnard, *Girls at School*, p. 46.

that they tried to prepare girls to lead. Occasionally, convent schools attempted to widen the curriculum in order to be more useful for girls when they became wives and mothers. The Parisian convent school Abbaye-aux-Bois recognized that most students would end up managing households, and thus exposed girls to a wider education than one based upon the reproduction of religious texts. The Princess de Ligne, who attended Abbye-aux-Bois, noted that she took nine “obediences” while at school: the Church, the Sacristy, the parlor, the apothecary, the laundry, the library, the dining hall, the kitchen, and the Sisterhood.<sup>53</sup> Six of the nine subjects were potentially secular in nature. While some of these subjects, like the kitchen and the laundry, would have prepared girls for overseeing their staff in these areas of the household and in knowing how they should be run effectively, these lessons do not appear to have included a discussion of how to interact with advisors (who, while technically “employees” were not the same as household servants) or of how to manage financial and legal issues. Abbaye-aux-Bois serves as an example of a highly a prestigious school, so it could not be assumed that its curriculum was indicative of the curriculum that most parents could afford for their daughters.

The Ursulines, from the congregation of Notre-Dame who ran a boarding school in Paris, attempted to modify their curriculum to make it more relevant to future wives and household managers. In the *Usages des religieuses de la congregation de Notre-Dame* (1690), they explained that in their school, the nuns had girls not only copy prayers and biblical passages but also “the formulas of promissory notes, receipts, acknowledgements of merchandise delivered, and other such acts as may be useful for

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<sup>53</sup> Sonnet, “A Daughter to Educate,” p. 127-128.

them to know in different walks of life.”<sup>54</sup> An especial focus on these skills was an exception to most boarding school curricula. It should be noted that the girls copied these types of documents but did not create them nor learn how to analyze them. The main focus of copying was to learn spelling and penmanship; the familiarity with legal and financial documents was secondary to learning to write through tracing and copying the text of these documents. However, even using these documents as copying material demonstrated a tacit acknowledgement on the part of the Notre-Dame instructors that girls would most likely become involved with legal and financial issues as adults.

Convent schools faced criticism, especially by the upper echelons of French society, for being too rigidly religious and thus impractical for girls who were destined for society. Those wealthy parents who did send their children to convent schools did so only temporarily, in order to learn the basics, before they then received their “real” education in society.<sup>55</sup> Even those parents who paid high prices for their daughters’ education did not stress the intellectual benefits. One mother who wrote to her daughter at a convent boarding school urged the girl to pay attention to her teachers and tutors, but most importantly, “learn to dress your hair.”<sup>56</sup> These schools served an important social function for many girls and their families, one that did not center on education. Many noblewomen were sent to convent schools a few years before marriage to bide their time. Girls utilized this time to make important social connections, either with high-ranking, wealthier girls or with the *pensionnaires*.

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p. 126.

<sup>55</sup> Zinsser, p. 27.

<sup>56</sup> Goodman, p. 80.

Just as the school served as a transitional period between childhood and marriage, it also could be a transitional phase for wealthy widows who paid a pension to the school in order to obtain room and board.<sup>57</sup> An entourage of courtiers and ladies in waiting accompanied high-ranking students and *pensionnaires*. *Pensionnaires* received visitors and sometimes even merchants were admitted to sell to them. If they desired, some women opened their apartments to visitors, including girls attending school. Although many religious schools did not approve of the worldliness and distraction presented by these residents, their monetary compensation was important to many schools. Observers characterized schools with paying residents as small courts, a place for girls to learn about the inner workings and expectations of noble society.<sup>58</sup> A few women who wrote about their educational experiences noted that a wealthy widow or married woman residing at the school at times proved to be a more knowledgeable teacher than the nuns who taught formally.<sup>59</sup> This situation served as a type of practical education for noblewomen, but one that focused on polite society rather than issues of information and expertise useful to management.

Some girls left school several years before marriage, years during which they did not keep up with their studies.<sup>60</sup> This resulted in girls losing what little knowledge they did acquire in school before assuming responsibilities as wives. The lessons that girls and women practiced daily were those pertaining to religion; literacy and math skills disappeared without practice. Many girls at school did not stay for long; in Parisian

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<sup>57</sup> Spencer, p. 86.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p. 86.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p. 89.

<sup>60</sup> Barnard, *Girls at School*, p. 24.

schools 58% of girls spent two years or less at school.<sup>61</sup> Spending only one year in school became common practice.<sup>62</sup> In addition, Martine Sonnet remarked that throughout the eighteenth-century, the curriculum at boys' schools evolved to encompass new intellectual trends while the curriculum at girls' schools remained static, even in the face of great intellectual development.<sup>63</sup> Girls struggled with the relevance of and retention of what they learned in school.

Families with adequate funds could hire tutors and *gouvernantes*. Just as the quality of education at boarding schools varied greatly, so did the quality of *gouvernantes*. The term *gouvernante* applied to anyone from a highly educated and capable tutor to the *dauphin* to an uneducated widow or a nurse or nanny. These people were charged predominantly with the health and manners of children (both male and female); education was often secondary, especially if the *gouvernante* was uneducated.<sup>64</sup> A survey of classified ads in Parisian newspapers revealed that those looking to hire a *gouvernante* were more concerned with her domestic abilities than with her ability to educate. One ad listed the preferred qualifications of taking care of housekeeping and the ability to sew before mentioning that candidates should know how to read and write.<sup>65</sup> The ad did not mention at what level one should be able to read and write and did not specify the candidate possess any instructional or pedagogical experience. Because of the preponderance of insufficiently educated *gouvernantes*, the practice came under the scrutiny of both philosophers and noblewomen alike.

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<sup>61</sup> Sonnet, p. 198.

<sup>62</sup> Spencer, p. 87.

<sup>63</sup> Sonnet, p. 287.

<sup>64</sup> Barnard, *Girls at School*, p. 32.

<sup>65</sup> Goodman, p. 69.

Madame de Maintenon, the founder of the girls' school at St. Cyr, criticized the practice because, as a child of thirteen, she had to teach her own *gouvernante* to read and write.<sup>66</sup> In a letter to her students at St. Cyr, Mme. de Maintenon pointed out that, without St. Cyr, "the most stupid woman imaginable" could have educated one of her students.<sup>67</sup> Belette Depuy, the *gouvernante* of a wealthy Parisian noble family, had to find someone else to write the letters she wanted to send to her student while her student was away for the Christmas holiday. On New Year's, a letter her student received from Belette said "If I knew how to write, I would have had the honor of writing to you already..."<sup>68</sup> The letter and memoir-writer Madame de Puysieux noted that "the blindness of mothers is extraordinary as regards those whom they choose to bring up their daughters. They employ women of no education in order to achieve the education of a young lady."<sup>69</sup>

Even the noted Enlightenment philosopher and personal friend of Voltaire, Emilie du Châtelet, could not reliably hire a personal tutor for her eldest son. Madame du Châtelet had to tutor her son's *précepteur* in Latin before the *précepteur* could teach the subject to his pupil.<sup>70</sup> Queen Isabel of Spain, perhaps the only early modern woman as well-known as her husband, began to re-educate herself shortly after ascending to the throne. She realized that the deficiencies of her childhood education left her ignorant of the very subjects a ruler should master—the Latin language and the history of diplomacy.

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<sup>66</sup> Barnard, *Girls at School*, p. 31 from Mme. de Maintenon, *Lettres et Entretiens sur l'Education des Filles*.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Goodman, p. 69.

<sup>69</sup> Barnard, *Girls at School*, p. 32 from Mme. de Puysieux, *Conseils à une Amie* (1749).

<sup>70</sup> Zinsser, p. 42.

Familiarity with and mastery of these subjects were seen as masculine endeavors not fitting a young lady, even though it was expected that this young lady would need to function as a ruler in a world where these skills were mandatory. Isabel learned these skills as an adult. She strove to ensure that her children would be fully educated in all subjects required by their station.<sup>71</sup> This, however, was a rare situation. In most cases, home education could be inferior to the limited and sporadic education at schools.

Philosophers and women alike suggested home schooling by mothers as the best avenue for educating young girls. The concept of mothers teaching their children in the home has Classical and Christian roots. Aristotle, despite his view of women as flawed beings and “misbegotten” men, advocated that mothers teach their children, even their sons, in the home early on. Eventually, he envisioned those boys fit for education leaving the home and attending schools. Daughters would remain in the home, learning important womanly duties from their mothers. The early Christian example of St. Anne served as a model for mothers educating their daughters. Artistic depictions of St. Anne instructing Mary insinuated that Mary drew upon these lessons to instruct Jesus.<sup>72</sup> While scholars today continue to debate the education of the historical Jesus, early modern portrayals suggested his mother acted as an important source of instruction during his childhood, giving divine sanction to home education. Enlightenment authors preferred home instruction, as they criticized religious education and religious instructors as being backwards and immoral, probably more because of anti-clericalism than because of a

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<sup>71</sup> Elizabeth Teresa Howe, *Education and Women in the Early Modern Hispanic World* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), p. 42.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, p. xiii.



critique of the quality of education.<sup>73</sup> Well-known author Madame d'Épinay in *Conversations d'Emilie* thought that learning through direct observation and experience by watching mothers was the most effective way of learning.<sup>74</sup> Another female writer on pedagogy, Madame de Genlis, stated that home education endowed daughters with “a strong sense of identity and made her life happier, more meaningful, and more fulfilled.”<sup>75</sup>

Even though it represented a philosophically popular option, home education possessed inherent problems. In the first place, mothers needed to be educated themselves in order to teach their daughters. Daughters could learn tasks through observation but not necessarily how to read, write, or calculate unless their mothers knew how to do these things and how to teach them. Not all women were as lucky as Madame de Maintenon, whose mother taught her to read at a young age. Secondly, even if a mother possessed the knowledge to instruct her daughter, most households lacked appropriate pedagogical material. Madame de Genlis wrote about a lack of children's books in her household, which forced her to practice with adult books when she was a child learning to read.<sup>76</sup> Lastly, as was the case with Renée, observing her mother would not have been helpful instruction for estate management. As the child of wealthy, urban *noblesse de robe*, Renée grew up in a trendy apartment in Paris, not a bustling provincial household and estate. While many wealthy *noblesse de robe* families invested heavily and purchased multiple properties, Renée never mentioned in her correspondence having

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<sup>73</sup> Spencer, p. 90-91.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, p. 91.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, p. 92.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

been privy to her family's management of such investments. Because she ended up saddled with responsibilities drastically different than those she learned from her mother, observation would not have furnished her with the management skills she would need. She became manager of the household and estate at La Coste armed with her meager Parisian convent education. Whether women were, like Renée, convent educated, otherwise formally educated, or educated in the home by *gouvernantes* or mothers, they were only marginally more prepared for household management than a woman lacking any education at all.

In order to render education more effective and interesting, interested individuals developed pedagogical innovations during the eighteenth century, both for use within schools and at home. One strategy for making education more interesting was to use games in order to teach reading, spelling, and grammar. Louis Dumas invented his Bureau Typographique, or Printer's Desk, with the idea that children could use it over time to learn increasingly advanced skills.<sup>77</sup> The desk itself was a wooden box with the letters of the alphabet lacquered in the lid. The bottom of the box consisted of cubby holes filled with pieces of paper with each letter of the alphabet printed on them. The games one could play with this box ranged from simple, like matching the paper letters with the letters on the lid or putting paper letters in alphabetical order, to creating words, sentences, and even poems.

In the same vein as the Printer's Desk, but in a more economical package, decks of cards with letters and syllables proliferated during this time<sup>78</sup>. These decks could be used to teach spelling and sentence construction, and children could play alone or with

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<sup>77</sup> Goodman, p. 71-2.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p. 73.

others. In most cases, these games were not marketed as being for children of one sex or another. The marketing stress was on the fact that they were for children, as these games made learning fun. However, the target audience for these products was limited, as only the elite could afford yet another added expense towards educating their children.

Parents were also concerned with the effectiveness of new pedagogical tools, especially considering the cost. Pierre Fresneau, an inventor who developed a simplified version of Dumas's Printer's Desk, lamented the fact that parents feel as though investing in these new games was too much of an extravagance for the education of a child, and yet they will spend their money on all kinds of frivolous luxury items (both for themselves and their children) that have no potential for educating.<sup>79</sup> While these tools effected limited change in the educational landscape, their development represented an acknowledgement by some that the education of children, and girls especially, remained inadequate into the eighteenth century.

The remainder of this study analyzes the relationships women forged with advisors as a result of their lack of preparation for household and estate management. As Renée did not receive an exceptional education, she, having been prepared by a basic convent education, assumed responsibility for the Sade properties in Provence. The world of provincial estate management was alien to her, and her advisors served as everything from ambassadors to stand-ins in this strange, new world. She created a distinct technique for managing her household and her family's finances, which is detailed in the chapters that follow.

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid, p. 71.

**CHAPTER THREE**  
**“Mon cher Ripert et mon cher Gaufridy”: Women, Advisors, and Household and Estate Management in Eighteenth-Century France**

This chapter explores the role of experts and advisors in household construction and management. It will reveal the extent to which Renée relied on her team of advisors, which consisted of the notary Fage, the household administrator of Mazan Ripert, and the notary and lawyer Gaufridy. Renée’s lack of an education that prepared her for household and estate management, coupled with the fact that she grew up in a household environment different than the one she inherited upon her marriage to Donatien, meant that her advisors counseled her on all aspects of household and estate management. They gave her advice on such varied responsibilities as hiring and policing her household staff, fulfilling the duties required of her by her community, interacting with her notoriously prickly mother, and arbitrating Donatien’s legal troubles. The major responsibility omitted from this list, the financial management of the household and estates, will be discussed by itself in the next chapter. This chapter focuses on the important ways that Renée’s team of advisors assisted her in surmounting her shortcomings and, as a result, participated actively in household construction and management.

**Women and Experts**

One context in which women in the eighteenth century interacted with non-relative men, aside from court and the *salons*, was through the consultation of professional experts. Lawyer and notaries, who were often one and the same and whose responsibilities often overlapped, represented a commonly consulted type of expert. The numbers of female clients who hired lawyers and appeared in court varies by country,

century, and region, but in general the percentage for early modern and eighteenth-century England and France was relatively high. The numbers of women involved in legal action in England steadily increased beginning in the sixteenth century, and by the end of the seventeenth century the majority of transactions, about three-quarters, involving probate or property matters, had female litigants.<sup>1</sup> In France, between 1680 and 1745, nearly one quarter of cases in Normandy's lower courts had either a female plaintiff or female defendant.<sup>2</sup> In twenty percent of the cases involving a female party, the female party was a noblewoman.<sup>3</sup> The overwhelming majority of cases involving women were civil cases, and most of those civil cases dealt with property, either property of living people or issues of probate. Property of various kinds spent a significant amount of time in the hands of women. Women could bring property to a marriage as a dowry and receive that property back in the event of a husband's death or a dissolution of the marriage. Widows managed property on behalf of minor children until the children reached adulthood and could legally take possession of it. If a woman remarried, she would still manage the inheritance of any children from a previous marriage. Therefore, anything that could be considered "property"—land, business interests, *rentes*, etc., was of vital concern to a woman. The importance of property to women ensured that lawyers and notaries saw a steady stream of female clients during the early modern and eighteenth-century periods.

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<sup>1</sup> Tim Stretton, *Women Waging Law in Elizabethan England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 41 and 54; and Mary Louise Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 223.

<sup>2</sup> Zoë A. Schneider, "Women before the Bench: Female Litigants in Early Modern Normandy," in *French Historical Studies*, 23:1, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 4 (Table 1).

In most cases, a lawyer assisted a woman with gaining access to or maintaining continuing control over her property, and used his expertise to help her gain the upper hand. A woman, in consultation with her lawyer, could decide which court would be most sympathetic to her cause. This information would undoubtedly come from legal counsel. For instance, women in England purposely brought their cases before the Requests court because this court was seen as the most sympathetic to the plight of the poor and the most liberal in interpreting “beyond the black letter of the law” and considering personal circumstances when leveling decisions. Because of this, even non-impooverished women appeared before the Requests court because the court was more accustomed to seeing female litigants and in handing down favorable decisions based on personal pleas.<sup>4</sup> Counselors representing women sought out co-counsel and judges who had historically handed down sympathetic rulings in similar situations. Women could spin their case so that it appeared they were in court as legal benefactors of their children and representatives of property that would eventually go to their children. Family members or family representatives (such as a family’s business manager or *homme d’affaire*) officially appeared in court but really served as a stand-in for a woman with a vested legal interest.

On the other hand, potential dangers existed when women relied on experts like lawyers to assist them in and out of court. Social commentary in both England and France warned women against unscrupulous lawyers who took advantage of female clients who did not have much experience with and knowledge of the legal system. François Fénelon, the early modern advocate for the practical education of girls,

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<sup>4</sup> Stretton, Chapter 6.

recommended that girls received a basic legal education so that as women they would not be easily duped by lawyers who over-charged them and counseled them into taking disastrous or superfluous legal action, in order to extract more money from naïve female clients. A lawyer could take advantage of a woman's legal naiveté and manipulate her to sue instead of trying to reach an amicable settlement out of court.<sup>5</sup> Women experienced with domestic management at least had practice with dealing with household agents and had possibly learned how to interact with a lawyer; women new to household management, or those unmarried, had to learn to navigate this world in a trial and error fashion.

Trust was an essential element in the relationship between a woman and a male expert, as female clients made these experts privy to personal, private information. A disloyal advisor could use the intimate information he learned about his clients to betray them. Renée learned this lesson when her notary Fage revealed to authorities Donatien's whereabouts at La Présidente's insistence, which resulted in Donatien's arrest. Whether Fage assisted in Donatien's arrest because La Présidente lured him with money, or if he did so because he felt it was ultimately in Renée's best interest, or a combination of both, Renée viewed Fage's use of insider information as treachery. This incident illustrated what could happen when a woman's need for assistance with her household duties meant that she had to include outsiders in the process. Thus, the decision on who to invite into one's circle as an advisor and what information should be shared with that person was not taken lightly by the women who relied on such assistance to fulfill their everyday duties.

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<sup>5</sup> Stretton, p. 124.

## The Notary

*It can be said that, by virtue of executing the duties of his job, the notary is already at the heart of economic life.*<sup>6</sup>

The under-studied but central role that notaries played in the lives of noble families warrants them their own section in this chapter. To better understand the history and responsibilities of the notary in eighteenth century France leads to a better understanding of not only the financial landscape of this period, but also of the critical roles notaries played in noble households. Renée kept two notaries on constant retainer (until Fage's firing in 1774) and regularly brought in other local notaries to serve as additional counsel. In order to grasp who these men were, what services they provided, and why such services were important to Renée, it is necessary to explore the unique case of the notary in France.

Studies centered on notaries have proliferated over the past decade.<sup>7</sup> In France especially, notaries left behind ample, organized, and detailed documentation of their business activities. Historians have come to realize that notarial archives can be mined for unique information, as they registered documents ranging from wills to marriage contracts to financial transactions. Notarial archives usually contain copies of all official

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<sup>6</sup> Alain Moreau, *Les Métamorphoses du Scribe: Histoire du Notariat Français*, (Editions SOCAPRESS, 1989), p. 19. Translation mine.

<sup>7</sup> See Claire Dolan, *Le Notarie, La Famille, et La Ville: Aix-en-Provence à la fin du XVIe siècle*, (Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 1998); Julie Hardwick, *The Practice of Patriarchy: Gender and the Politics of Household Authority in Early Modern France*, (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998); Philip T. Hoffman, Gilles Postel-Vinay, and Jean-Laurent Rosenthal, *Priceless Markets: The Political Economy of Credit in Paris, 1660-1870*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). In his work published in 1987, Ezra Suleiman remarked that the notary has yet to find his historian. Since the publication of Suleiman's work, scholars have come to realize the richness of notarial sources and have begun to more frequently use notarial information, as well as to study notaries in their own right. [Ezra N. Suleiman, *Private Power and Centralization in France: The Notaries and the State*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987)].



documents registered by a particular notary; these documents became either the property of a notary's successor or the state upon the original notary's death. However, one unique aspect of Gaspard Gaufridy's archive is that it contains personal correspondence from Renée. When combined with related correspondence on the Sade family from various Parisian and provincial archives, the official documents and personal correspondence between Gaufridy and his most important clients reveal the financial state of a provincial French household and estate during the mid to late eighteenth century.

The history of the notary in France is quite different from that of the notary in Britain and the United States. Whereas notaries in the Anglo world only serve to verify identity and witness the signing of official documents, the notary in France did, and still today, performs a greater variety of duties. Notaries in France first appeared after Gaul fell under Roman law. In this period, notaries served simply as scribes in the Roman legal apparatus. By the eighteenth century, notaries had evolved past serving solely as government scribes to active participants in the French governmental bureaucracy. They wrote and legalized all public, governmental contracts such as wills, land sales, leases, business transactions, marriage arrangements, death certificates, household inventories, and financial loan transactions. In a time before governments issued birth certificates, death certificates, or personal identification cards, the verification of identity for legal purposes was tricky. Notaries were charged with ensuring that the contract was legal and binding by testifying to the identity of the signatories. For those who could not sign their names, notaries established the validity of someone's mark. Notaries also kept copies of all of the documents they registered in, what could become over a long career, voluminous dossiers. After the retirement or death of a notary, his successor inherited

these dossiers. Therefore, notaries were important record-keepers in a time when the central government did not possess an apparatus for storing and maintaining official documents.

To become a notary, one had to purchase a notarial office. These offices were sold by the royal government, and the government regulated how many notarial offices were available, and thus how many notaries could practice, in each province. The average notarial office in Paris in the 1700s cost between 100,00 and 300,000 *livres*, a substantial sum.<sup>8</sup> The state also fixed the prices that notaries could charge for their services, eliminating competition among notaries for business. In order to successfully purchase a notarial office, a potential notary had to fulfill several basic requirements: be at least 25 years of age, pass a royal examination, and pass a “moral inquiry.”<sup>9</sup> Different geographical areas might have slightly different or additional requirements. For example, the society of notaries in Orléans necessitated that candidates acquire three references—one from a church officially attesting to the candidate’s morality, one from a non-relative practicing notary attesting to the applicant’s potential and skill, and one from a procureur attesting to the candidate’s legal knowledge.<sup>10</sup> Granted, not all notaries were spectacular at their occupations; the legal record is rife with accounts of notaries being sued for mishandling clients’ money, going bankrupt, or for legal incompetence.<sup>11</sup>

While a notarial position was not the most glamorous or lucrative profession, these strident requirements were necessary due to the nature of a notary’s work. Notaries

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<sup>8</sup> Hoffman, Fig. 1.1, p. 29.

<sup>9</sup> Moreau, p. 57.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, p. 58.

<sup>11</sup> For examples of this, see Hardwick and Hoffman.

needed more than basic literacy skills in order to properly carry out their duties, as the writing element of their past function as scribes continued into the eighteenth century. In addition, notaries needed enough legal knowledge in order to properly draw up contracts. In fact, many notaries were also lawyers, as was the case with Gaufridy, who was an *avocat* in the city of Apt. Possession of a law degree did not serve as an indication of one's mode of employment; lawyers in eighteenth-century France ranged from poor scribes to ennobled elites. Law colleges supplied more lawyers than the courts actually demanded. Thus, many lawyers served as notaries in order to work when they were not practicing law.<sup>12</sup> Or, like Gaufridy, lawyers who worked as personal council for prominent families provided both legal and notarial services. The activities of notaries towards the end of the *Ancien Régime* were fundamentally legal in nature, involving many branches of law including family, commercial, and State.<sup>13</sup> According to the *Traité des Connaissances nécessaires à un Notaire* (Paris, 1774), notaries were responsible for giving the *actes* they registered the authority of the law and for proving their truth.<sup>14</sup>

Notaries were responsible for drawing up and seeing to the signing and public registration of official documents, and most of these documents had a set script of formatting and language. Thus, the view that notaries were merely scribes, writing out documents according to accepted standard templates, persisted until the recent renewed interest in the notarial profession. Claire Dolan's careful study of the Hugoleni family of notaries in sixteenth-century Aix-en-Provence revealed that, while a document like a marriage contract or a will did have an accepted template pattern, individual notaries

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<sup>12</sup> David A. Bell, *Lawyers and Citizens: The Making of a Political Elite in Old Regime France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 32.

<sup>13</sup> Moreau, p. 65.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

personally influenced the documents they created. Dolan elaborated the method of André Hugoleni, as he drew up many last wills and testaments for clients during Aix's resurgence of plague in the sixteenth century. His method was to receive oral testaments from his clients, oftentimes while standing in the street and recording what his clients shouted down to him from their bedroom windows as they lay dying of plague. He recorded these oral statements in a notebook, and his notes were necessarily sparse as he was trying to write, stand in the street, and understand a dying person's attempts at shouting. He often took several testaments back-to-back. He then returned to his *étude*, or office, and wrote up a full will based on his notes. This method, of turning a deathbed oral testimony from a distance into a robust legal document, begs the question of how the notary "elaborat[ed] the last wills" of his clients.

In essence, when drawing up a contract or other legal document, the notary's job was to make what his client wanted legal and binding, and in effect the notary did what he had to do to make it so.<sup>15</sup> André Hugoleni did not sit in front of his clients, faithfully transcribing every word they uttered and then using that as a formula for a long, formalized document. He instead, without his client present, used sketchy notes based on a conversation to articulate the gist of his client's wishes and to secure the legality of those wishes. Standard language began and ended different types of legal documents; however, the information that comprised the bulk of the document came from the notary's rendition of a conversation with a client. This can be evidenced by the fact that notaries practiced the formalized language that book-ended a legal document. Pages from a provincial notary's notebook demonstrate how he practiced writing these standard

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<sup>15</sup> Dolan, p. 57.

introductions, such as “*Louis, par la grâce de dieu roy...*” or the full date in written instead of numerical form.<sup>16</sup> These stock phrases were present in all registered documents, whereas the content was based upon the client’s needs. Notaries were privy to the most private personal and financial information about their clients and took it upon themselves to generate personalized documents to fit the needs of individual clients.

Because notaries were integral to the creation of so many types of legal documents, all classes of people utilized notaries throughout their life-cycle. For instance, the families of two young people getting married relied on a notary to draw up a marriage license. A notary would then help a young couple access the finances necessary to pay for an apprenticeship, finance a business endeavor, or buy a venal office. During prosperous times a notary would arrange for a person with money to lend to find a borrower; conversely, if the client fell on hard times, the notary would facilitate borrowing from credit networks. The notary would draw up a will for parents to determine the destination of inheritance money. Notaries assisted widows and those without children with securing financial stability into old age. Both men and women, young and old, frequently required the assistance of a notary throughout their lifetimes. Many clients used the services of the same notary for multiple transactions, so there was a sense of loyalty between clients and their notary. About 80% of loans brokered in Paris during the eighteenth century were drawn up by a notary the client had used for previous and/or future business.<sup>17</sup> Thus, notaries tended to know their clients after repeated business and were privy to private information over a long period of time. This put

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<sup>16</sup> Directory of Pierre Matthieu, No. 6; 1703-1749, French Notarial Registers, 1410-1749; VAULT case MS 5028; Newberry Library Manuscript and Archival Collections, European Manuscripts Post-1500; Newberry Library, Chicago, IL.

<sup>17</sup> Hoffman, p. 119.

notaries in a position to know what was best for their clients and to vouch for them as responsible lenders and borrowers in private credit transactions.

The Crown set a fixed price, determined by region, that a notary could charge for his services; therefore, within a region, prices for notarial services did not vary. Poor and elite clients paid the same amount for the same services of the same notaries. Because the state also capped the number of notarial offices available in each region, there was not much competition between notaries or much choice for clients. While Gaufridy was personal friends with the Sades and became immersed in their personal finances, he provided services to hundreds of other clients in the region of Provence, none of whom were as prominent as the Sades.

An image included in Alain Moreau's work on notaries represents a typical notarial *étude*, or office, in eighteenth-century France.<sup>18</sup> Often the *étude* was simply a room in the notary's house; very few notaries could afford to have a separate building to house their notarial office. Two of the most important and prominent features of an *étude* were the notary's desk and locking drawers or cabinets. Since notaries were tasked with creating and storing all documents they registered, the writing surface and storage areas were crucial to the running of business. In an age when both desks and locking cabinets were rare, these implements proved essential to the notary, as he was expected to store and pass on to his successor documents containing private, personal information. The ability for the notary to lock away his documents was a rare and special privilege. Julie Hardwick's study of sixteenth-century notaries in Nantes begins an anecdote where the authorities were attempting to seize the financial documents of a notary on the lam,

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<sup>18</sup> Le Notaire--XVIIIe siècle. Gravure. B.N. Estampes. In Moreau, p 54.

accused of embezzling his clients' money. The privacy afforded by a set of locking cabinets becomes evident in Hardwick's vignette. The royal officials investigating the embezzlement claims demanded that the notary's wife open the cabinets so that his documents could be inventoried. She was able to buy time, stating that she did not possess a key but would write to her husband (whom she claimed was out of town on business) to have him send a key to his locked cabinet. Out of respect for a locked, private space, the royal prosecutor acquiesced, giving the wife enough time to consult with a lawyer of her own. Not even the authorities, suspecting a crime, would force open a locked cabinet when there was a chance the owner would willingly hand over the key. Access to such a closed, private space was reserved for the very wealthy and for the notary.

The *étude* portrayed as typical of the eighteenth century in Moreau's work shows a well-dressed notary standing in front of his desk, a desk covered with books, papers, and writing tools. He appears to be ending a conversation with a young male client, as other clients line up beside the door. An elderly woman, the next client in line, is being helped across the room to meet with the notary. Also in line waiting for his services are a young woman wearing simple clothing and a well-dressed middle-aged man. This image helps illustrate that men and women both, of all ages and from all strata of social classes, required the assistance of notaries. It also supports the notion of notaries as literate men with training in law and the moral capacity to be trusted with the personal information of their clients.

Statistical analysis of the activities of notaries across France during the early modern period and eighteenth century attests to the frequent use of notarial services. In

sixteenth-century Aix-en-Provence, a city in the province containing the Sade ancestral lands, between twenty and twenty-five notaries served a population of approximately 15,000 people.<sup>19</sup> That number averages out to between 600 and 750 people per notary, without taking into account some of that number was minor children. A notary in Aix in 1559 would have registered between 500 and 1,000 acts per year, which, according to data available on the productivity of Parisian notaries, was proportionate to the work of notaries in the much more populated capital city.<sup>20</sup>

A survey of the dossiers of four Parisian notaries in 1794 reveals that 2,416 acts were registered, meaning each notary registered approximately 604 documents, which corresponds to the number of documents registered by the notaries of Provence two centuries earlier. Of the *actes* registered by the four Parisian notaries, 71% were economic transactions. Credit transactions represented a full 50% of those economic *actes*. Of the remaining documents, 26% were family-oriented legal documents, such as wills, marriage contracts, and property transfers. The remaining 2% were documents registered for the royal government. These statistics demonstrate both the productivity of notaries, as well as the fact that the economic transactions represented the overwhelming majority of their work. These numbers vary little when one left the capital city in that same year. In the mid-size city of Lyon, a survey of the documents from 3 *études* shows that of the 539 *actes* registered (an average of 179 *actes* per notary, which is less than the averages for Aix and Paris), 68% were economic matters, 28% were family documents, and 3% were governmental. One *étude* in the comparably small city of Perpignan registered 109 *actes* that year, 76% of which were economic in nature, 14% family

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<sup>19</sup> Dolan, p. 37-38.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, p. 39.



related, and 9% governmental.<sup>21</sup> These percentages stayed consistent, whether the notary was urban or rural, in a big city or a small town. By the eighteenth century, notaries not only dealt with family legal matters but had become important players in the French economy.

Notaries became central to the economic life of eighteenth-century France, especially lending and borrowing transactions, because of France's lack of a national banking system. The disastrous experience with John Law's national banking experiment at the beginning of the century represented France's only attempt at centralizing and nationalizing the banking system, until Napoleon instituted the Bank of France in 1800.<sup>22</sup> The absence of a central banking system meant that people with money to invest or lend and people in need of loans had no formal way of finding each other. In addition, those with money to lend had no way of evaluating the reputation of a potential borrower, nor did they possess any mechanism for ensuring repayment of the loan. Philip Hoffman deemed this situation "asymmetric information." Notaries, because of their legal background and contact with so many clients, were ideal intermediaries to help overcome the problem of asymmetric information. Immediately after the Law Affair, many people with money to lend feared re-entering the financial market. Notaries helped assuage people's fears by acting as brokers who helped creditors and borrowers find each other. A notary generally knew the real financial status of his clients and could vouch for someone's inclination to honesty. Having a notary involved in a credit transaction helped lessen the risk one took when one lent money to a stranger. The ability to lend money

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<sup>21</sup> These statistics were compiled from surveys of notarial documents in Moreau, p. 67.

<sup>22</sup> For a discussion of John Law and his financial system, see, for example, Antoin E. Murphy, *John Law: Economic Theorist and Policy-Maker*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

beyond the circles of family and close acquaintances benefited the lender, the creditor, and the expansion of the French economy in general.

As mentioned above, notaries acted as brokers, bringing people with symbiotic interests and needs together who would have no other way of finding each other. Notaries themselves typically did not manage loans as would an investment banker.<sup>23</sup> Some notaries did act as a middleman between clients, accepting deposits, recording them, and then passing them on. They not only facilitated credit transactions from among their own clients; notaries also engaged in what Hoffman terms “*cross-étude*” transactions, whereby a notary could introduce one of his clients to a client of another notary. Therefore, personal credit transactions in eighteenth-century France began to resemble webs as potential lenders from one notary’s practice were put in touch with potential borrowers from a different notarial practice. Because notaries were able to allow people to acquire information and cultivate credit relationships from beyond personal circles, credit networks began to expand from local to regional and national. Due to France’s lack of a centralized, national banking system, such far-reaching networks would not have been possible without the facilitation offered by notaries. Notaries served as critical links in the financial system of eighteenth-century France.

Studies of the activities of Parisian notaries in the early eighteenth century demonstrate that, as notaries became more integral to the credit system in France after the Law Affair, they began to offer services slightly beyond those of informants and brokers. They have been shown to have engaged in lending short-term credit themselves, one example being the policy of forwarding their own money to a client in need of a loan and

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<sup>23</sup> Hoffman, p. 114.

then using a potential lender's deposit to repay themselves. They also held deposits of money to be lent, lending those out and replacing a client's deposit with the deposit of another client, much like a bank would do. However, doing this on such a personal basis, without the assurances of knowing investors (as a bank would work), was extremely risky, especially when borrowers did not pay back their loans. This led to increasing bankruptcies among notaries in the first decades of the eighteenth century. Between 1731 and 1756, fifteen Parisian notaries had gone bankrupt.<sup>24</sup> While fifteen may not seem like a large number, considering hundreds of notaries worked in the capital, but each of those fifteen notaries had hundreds of clients, bringing the total number of people possibly affected by a bankruptcy into the thousands. The existence of a notary accused of mishandling finances is not solely an eighteenth-century phenomenon; the anecdote from sixteenth-century Nantes discussed above indicates that notaries were susceptible to financial ruin anytime they engaged in economic activities. But, the expansion of the notary's role in the eighteenth century increased the risk a notary took when engaging in finance. The increase in bankruptcies of notarial practices meant that, by the second half of the eighteenth century, many notaries had decided to revert to the role of broker, as the personal risk was lessened by acting in that capacity alone.<sup>25</sup>

The fact that the work of notaries was so integral to the lives of all people, from the most modest classes to the elite, along with the fact that the government tightly controlled the number of notaries, ensured that notaries served a steady stream of clients. Notaries aided all clients in finding lines of credit or identifying potential borrowers, and they were especially useful to women who engaged in economic activity, most notable

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<sup>24</sup> Hoffman, p. 145-6.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 145.

noble and elite women. Notaries dealt extensively with noble clients, who comprised a significant number of borrowers and lenders in eighteenth-century France. Of those who engaged in private notary-facilitated lending and borrowing in Paris during the eighteenth century, the majority of borrowers, 64%, were of the nobility. Of private lenders, 39% were noble, while 33% were non-noble urban elites.<sup>26</sup> Thus two times the number of nobles borrowed than loaned, and 72% of lenders were social and economic elites. From 1700-1780, women comprised approximately 20% of all private lenders in Paris.<sup>27</sup> This was a significant increase from a century before, when women represented only 12% of the total private credit market. By the eighteenth century, women exercised a significant presence in the French economy as both borrowers and lenders.

The increase in women's participation in the economy is related to the financial work of notaries, as notaries provided women with essential information about borrowers and creditors to which they never before had access. Notaries brokered financial transactions "across boundaries of gender, geography, and social class."<sup>28</sup> Without them, financial transactions would have stayed mostly within families and neighborhoods and would not have connected those who have money with those who need money. Elite and noble women were especially dependent upon notaries for this kind of information as, unlike men and lower class women, elite women tended to engage with finances through domestic duties rather than public, commercial transactions. To fully appreciate the importance of the notary as a financial broker in eighteenth-century France, his role as facilitator of women's entry into financial markets must be explored.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 163-166.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, Table 3.6, p. 67.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p. 163.

The next section of this chapter details the ways in which Renée’s advisors, including notaries and experienced members of the household staff, assisted her with household and estate management issues. Her advisors aided her with seven distinct management challenges, which are presented thematically within this chapter. They assisted her with very basic, as well as special occasion, household provisioning. Her advisors offered indispensable advice on the topic of hiring, firing, and policing her staff. Renée consulted Ripert on matters pertaining to basic property and estate maintenance. When denizens of La Coste requested Renée’s assistance in arbitrating local disputes, she turned to her team of experts for advice. The notary Gaufridy took an active role in mediating Renée’s difficult relationship with her mother, whose support proved integral to the survival of Renée’s household. Gaufridy’s background as a lawyer meant he could dispense valuable legal advice when Renée had questions about her husband’s arrests, imprisonments, flights, and trials. Finally, those advisors who had become intimates of Renée supported her in her failed attempt to reconstruct the Sade household and finances in 1774.

### **Renée and her Advisors**

Renée’s arrival at La Coste represented the first time she had lived outside of urban Paris or under the close supervisions of her parents at their estate in Normandy. Her marriage to Donatien necessitated that she left apartment life in the capital and the familiar surroundings of her family’s estate to become the manager of the Sade châteaux in Provence. She moved into La Coste and assumed direct responsibility for the household, as well as authority over other Sade properties in the region. While Ripert

had been running the Sade property of Mazan and continued to do so after Donatien and Renée married, Renée often asked Ripert for advice or gave him instructions.

Technically, Ripert answered to Renée and Donatien, but Donatien's frequent absences and lack of interest in managing his estate, coupled with Renée's lack of experience, meant in reality Ripert exercised a significant amount of autonomy over Mazan. He became one of Renée's close advisors on matters at La Coste. Renée also made the acquaintance of Donatien's childhood friend, the lawyer and notary Gaufridy, upon her arrival at La Coste. In addition to the financial matters described at length in the next chapter, Gaufridy, in concert with Ripert and Fage (during his tenure of employment for the Sade family), advised Renée on matters ranging from household staff management, property maintenance, community relations, and legal matters. These men acted as lifelines for Renée when she encountered a new situation or needed assistance beyond her own knowledge and education. These men were employees and family friends, and Renée interacted with them regularly in Donatien's absence.

Renée looked to her advisors to assist with provisioning the château of La Coste. A great amount of food and other items were exchanged between Renée and Ripert, who managed the Sade property of Mazan. In the spring of 1772, Renée wrote Ripert asking that he fill a cask with wine, and do so quickly because La Coste was out. She also requested that he send vegetables and sausage.<sup>29</sup> While it is not clear, it appears as though she requested these items of Ripert because they were grown or produced at Mazan, a château owned by the Sades, and thus she was asking for her own products.

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<sup>29</sup> La Marquise de Sade à M. Ripert, spring 1772, in Alice M. Laborde, *Correspondances du marquis de Sade et de ses proches enrichies de documents, notes et commentaries, vol. V. oct. 1771-27 juin 1772, le marquis et la marquise de Sade au château de la Coste* (Geneva: Editions Slatkine, 1994).

However, this may demonstrate that La Coste was not a self-sufficient château, and since Mazan did not house the family and its servants, there was a surplus of food and drink being produced at Mazan. Ripert also sent her furniture, and with many shipments that he sent to La Coste, he included extra gifts for Renée, one example of this being the inclusion of fresh melons intended for Renée.<sup>30</sup>

Donatien made few appearances in Renee's correspondence, but she did mention him or allude to his presence when necessary. Usually, the orders she made to Ripert consisted of basics—butter, lard, vegetables, and maybe some reasonably priced cuts of meat. However, she mentioned to Ripert that the wine he had sent, which was the usual, was not good enough and that something of better quality should be delivered to La Coste immediately.<sup>31</sup> Earlier in the year, in May, she requested that, on the first nice day, the Marquis' complete bedroom set be sent from Mazan to La Coste.<sup>32</sup> Her insistence that everything be perfect and arrive to her as soon as possible was palpable in her instructions to Ripert:

I beg of you, my dear Ripert, to not forget to send me, the first nice day, on a mule, the Master's complete bed that is still at Mazan, and take care to have it covered so that it is not spoiled by any dust.

These urgent demands and changes in taste implied that her husband was at home, and that his tastes demanded extra comforts and expenses. The amount of and quality of the food requested corresponded to Donatien's presence or absence. Clearly, despite their debt, Donatien expected to maintain a noble lifestyle. In order to meet his demands,

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<sup>30</sup> La Marquise de Sade à M. Ripert, juin 1772, in Laborde, Vol. V.

<sup>31</sup> La Marquise de Sade à Ripert, end of 1773, in Alice M. Laborde, *Correspondances du marquis de Sade et de ses proches enrichies de documents, notes et commentaries, vol. VII. 1773-1776, la vie quotidienne au château de La Coste* (Geneva: Editions Slatkine, 1994).

<sup>32</sup> La Marquise de Sade à Ripert, 20 mai 1773, in Laborde, Vol. VII.

Renée requested the assistance of Ripert in locating and shipping the requested items to La Coste. She sent shopping lists to Ripert, and any items he did not have on hand at Mazan he would travel to local markets procure for her and Donatien. The Sade advisors assisted with achieving the lifestyle the Marquis expected to live, despite the financial realities facing the Sade family.

Renée relied on her advisors to assist her with hiring and managing her household staff at La Coste. The summer of 1772 represented the first time that she dealt directly with overseeing and policing the employees at La Coste. Her favorite and closest household servant, Gothon, caused a minor scandal around La Coste, and Renée deployed Ripert to help her deal with the situation.<sup>33</sup> Gothon had been caught leaving the house at night and cavorting with young men of the town.<sup>34</sup> Renée told Ripert that she “profited from your opinion on Gothon,” and the same letter mentioned Gothon working at Mazan.<sup>35</sup> Fage, exasperated with Gothon’s behavior, wrote to Ripert suggesting that Gothon should “from now on stay at Mazan” and he thanked Ripert for taking over the arrangements for Gothon’s new lodging. Fage felt that the “*tapages nocturnes*,” or nightly disturbances of the peace, Renée permitted Gothon to engage in with the young people of the village of La Coste need to be put to an end.<sup>36</sup> Between June 1772 and June 1773, Gothon passed between Mazan and La Coste several times, but her continued inappropriate behavior while back at La Coste was audacious enough to deserve

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<sup>33</sup> Gothon’s real name was Anne Marguerite Maillefer. It became common practice for masters and mistresses to give their servants nicknames or rename them completely during the tenure of their employment.

<sup>34</sup> M. Fage à M. Ripert, juin 1773, in Laborde, Vol. VII.

<sup>35</sup> La Marquise de Sade à M. Ripert, juin 1772, in Laborde, Vol. V.

<sup>36</sup> M. Fage à M. Ripert, juin 1773, in Laborde, Vol. VII.



comment from Fage, who recommended that Gothon remain at Mazan under Ripert's more strict eye, suggesting that Renée's attempts to punish and control Gothon had failed.

Studies detailing the lives of servants in eighteenth-century France, as well as the relationships forged between them and their masters, shed some light on the situation involving Gothon.<sup>37</sup> It is possible that Gothon really did simply have a wild streak, as she was a relatively young, unmarried woman who, like many domestic servants, immigrated to France looking for work in a household that could pay her wages. A native of Switzerland, Gothon probably sought a few years' work in order to amass enough wages and property through her employment to put together a dowry. As she worked towards this goal, she socialized with other members of La Coste's staff, as well as her peers in other households and in the nearby town. Her leaving the house at night most likely was not sneaking out behind Renée's back; masters and mistresses tended to afford household servants the right to go wherever they wanted during periods when their services were not required.<sup>38</sup> This included physically leaving the house during off-hours of the day. The fact that Gothon left the premises and interacted with other people was probably not the only thing Ripert and Fage reacted to. It is possible that the rowdiness she engaged in was extreme and could cause harm to her person, her reputation, or the reputation of the Sades (which did not need tarnishing from yet another source).

Another potential motivation for Ripert's intervention in the Gothon situation could have been sexual propriety and the related potential for pregnancy. The

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<sup>37</sup> Cissie Fairchilds, *Domestic Enemies: Servants & Their Masters in Old Regime France* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984) and Sarah C. Maza, *Servants and Masters in Eighteenth-Century France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

<sup>38</sup> Maza, p. 191-192.

stereotypical image of female servants as sexually open stems from the reality that many female domestic servants saw sexual activity and even pregnancy as a way of establishing a relationship with either a male staff member or even the house's master.<sup>39</sup> In the minds of servants, such a relationship could lead to special favors, preferential treatment, or even marriage. Thus, Gothon may have been in danger of becoming pregnant out of wedlock if she were looking for a way of gaining favor with one of the young men in the town of La Coste. The letters exchanged on this subject indicated that, while the discussion of Gothon took place, Donatien was present at La Coste, either as a free man right before the Marseilles affair, or as a fugitive after his escape from prison. Renée, Ripert, and Fage may have been concerned about Gothon being present while Donatien was stuck inside the château, unable to leave for fear of being detected.<sup>40</sup> It is unlikely that Gothon was actually pregnant during this period, as this is not mentioned in any correspondence, nor by any Sade biographers.<sup>41</sup> Whatever the real reason for Gothon's temporary banishment from La Coste, Fage and Ripert helped Renée come to a solution about what to do with her.

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<sup>39</sup> Statistics show that between one-tenth and one-third of recorded illegitimate pregnancies during this period were attributed to master/servant sexual relationships. The real number was probably higher, as masters possessed the resources to cover up such pregnancies. Female servants were considered "fair sexual game," so sexual relationships between male masters and female servants were accepted practice, generally speaking. See Maza, p. 189.

<sup>40</sup> Sade biographies have noted that Donatien expressed attraction to this young female domestic, and he has even been quoted as saying she possessed "the sweetest ass to ever leave Switzerland." Therefore, fears about Donatien's behavior around her were well founded. See Francine Du Plessix Gray, *At Home with the Marquis de Sade: A Life* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), p. 111.

<sup>41</sup> It is widely believed that Donatien fathered a child with another female servant, Anne Sablonnière, in 1775. However, since Anne was married, it was recorded that her husband fathered the child. That the speculation surrounding the Sablonnière child was widely discussed in the Sade household, it seemed as though this was not a taboo subject and had Gothon been in a similar situation, speculation would likely have surfaced about her, too.

The reason for Renée's ineffective management of Gothon could have been Renée's lack of experience overseeing a servant or staff member. Before arriving at La Coste, Renée had never taken charge of a household and had never been in a position of direct authority over an employee. Her lack of experience in this arena represented one possible cause for the need to rely on Ripert. Even if Renée had thought to undertake some reading on the subject of servant management, the literature available would have been of limited interest to and use to her. A survey of prescriptive literature available in the eighteenth century on the topic of servant/master relationships reveals that such literature assumed a male readership, as it focused on masters instead of mistresses. Treatises on dealing with domestic servants did not recognize that women played a large role in this arena, save for perhaps a small staff that helped only the most elite women with tasks such as bathing and dressing. These works focused on a master's moral imperative to see to the appropriate religious education of his servants, as this would lead to righteous behavior among domestic workers. Behavior problems were to be remedied by physical punishment and intensified religious instruction. A "handbook" for women who, while inexperienced, assumed responsibility for a household staff of varied backgrounds and ages, did not seem to exist in this period.<sup>42</sup>

Another possibility was that, of all of Renée's employees at La Coste, she was the closest to Gothon. Gothon served as a friend and companion to Renée and a nanny to the Sade children. Renée spent years at a time alone at La Coste while her husband was away, and while Ripert and Gaufridy interacted with her on a regular basis, they did not see her on a daily basis like Gothon did. Thus, Renée may have been in an awkward

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<sup>42</sup> Maza, p. 7.

position when it came to punishing and controlling Gothon. Her ineffective management of Gothon might have stemmed from a reluctance to alienate her friend by being too heavy-handed. In either case, at first glance, Fage's suggestion that Ripert should take over Renée's job of overseeing her staff members seems audacious and like an undermining of Renée's authority. However, Fage may have picked up on the fact that either Renée did not know what to do, or did not wish to be as heavy-handed as necessary, so he gave Renée a convenient method of controlling the scandal in her household without damaging her relationship with Gothon. Renée obviously disagreed with Gothon's behavior and felt as though Ripert's stricter supervision would be valuable, as she sent Gothon to Mazan to work.

During Gothon's year under Ripert's watchful eye, Renée took advantage of the situation and cast herself as the "good guy." She regularly inquired after Gothon's well-being and decided to send Gothon 1 *louis* per month for her upkeep. In her correspondence with Ripert, Renée frequently reminded him to give Gothon her 1 *louis*. Renée continued to supply Gothon with items for personal comfort, such as sheets, napkins, and towels.<sup>43</sup> She included these items in packages with her letters, with orders to Ripert that:

In here you will find two sets of bed linens, six napkins and six candles, if you would be so good as to give them to Gothon, along with the blanket and the curtain and continue to pay her the *louis*.

Renée's last mention of Gothon for the year of 1773 was a reminder to Ripert that Gothon's 1 *louis* per month payment began with her first day of work at Mazan, telling

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<sup>43</sup> La Marquise de Sade à Ripert, 23 septembre 1773, in Laborde, Vol. VII.

him that “the *louis* to Gothon starts the day of her arrival.”<sup>44</sup> Renée continued to request small favors from Gothon, such as knitting her a pair of stockings to be sent as soon as possible.<sup>45</sup> She later requested more stockings from Gothon and promised to reimburse her for the yarn.<sup>46</sup> These small favors demonstrate Renée’s continued desire to maintain a close relationship with Gothon, and perhaps there was a sentimental value to the small items Gothon knitted for her friend and supervisor. Despite Gothon’s presence at Mazan being punishment for her misbehavior at La Coste, Renée continued to look after her well-being, to send her care packages from home, and to maintain a close personal relationship. With the assistance of Ripert and Fage, Renée was able to effectively correct an employee’s behavioral problem that either she did not know how to deal with, did not want to deal with, or both. In the end, Gothon returned to La Coste apparently reformed (as no more mention of such behavior on her part exists) and Renée was able to keep a friendly relationship with her, a feat that might not have been possible had Renée cast herself as the punishing authority.

While the situation with Gothon represented how Renée dealt with long-time, close employees at La Coste, Renée also relied on her advisors to assist her with new members of the household staff. She began her correspondence in 1773 with a question to Ripert involving the gardener. She inquired whether he was due the right of storing his surplus of vegetables at La Coste. It had been brought to Renée’s attention that the gardener had asked Ripert for the right to store the vegetables, and Ripert rejected the

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<sup>44</sup> La Marquise de Sade à Ripert, 28 septembre 1773, in Laborde, Vol. VII.

<sup>45</sup> La Marquise de Sade à Ripert, septembre 1773, in Laborde, Vol. VII.

<sup>46</sup> La Marquise de Sade à Ripert, septembre 1773, in Laborde, Vol. VII.

request.<sup>47</sup> Three of Renée's local acquaintances had in their possession a piece of paper noting that while the gardener could take personal possession of a surplus of vegetables, Ripert had denied him the ability to keep the surplus at the château. When this note came to Renée's attention, she wrote to Ripert, stating:

It appears to me, from this paper, if it is not false, that the gardener has the right to leave the surplus of his vegetables for three months and that you do not want this. If he does have this right, it is not fair to deprive him of this, but if it will cause some harm, then it is not right for him to demand it. In the end, everything should be for what is best. I responded that you have complained about this but that you do not want to be unjust regarding him and that I would write to you.

Managing an estate and dealing with issues involving land and crops was alien to Renée, as she grew up in a distinctly urban environment. She moved to La Coste with no experience managing a rural estate. The issue of surplus vegetables might not seem like the most serious situation, however, it was indicative of the relationship employees had to La Coste. Renée felt that there was a chance Ripert was wrong in his denial of the gardener's right to stock his surplus on Sade property. No correspondence exists to help explain why Ripert thought the gardener was not due this right, but Renée wanted such an explanation. Her letter left open the option that Ripert was, in fact, correct in his assessment of the situation. She did not reprimand him for his denial of the gardener, but instead approached the situation as if she was simply trying to understand Ripert's reasoning. The involvement of Renée's acquaintances spurred this investigation on Renée's part in the first place, and she framed her questioning of Ripert's decision as if she only wanted to understand his logic so that she could report it back to others. If, however, Ripert had initially been wrong, her letter granted him the opportunity to

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<sup>47</sup> La Marquise de Sade à Ripert, end of mars 1773, in Laborde, Vol. VII.

reverse his decision. Renée herself did not have an opinion on what was right in this situation, but she seemed to have some doubt at Ripert's conclusion. Without not openly doubting him, she demonstrated her skepticism and tacitly asked him to explain his reasoning, since he had interacted initially with the gardener without Renée's input.

Ripert's reply and explanation of his reasoning was not recorded in the collection, but it can be assumed that he convinced Renée that his decision was the correct one, as she did not keep the gardener for long. In November of the same year, she wrote to Ripert asking him to find a good gardener as soon as possible due to the laziness of the current gardener.<sup>48</sup> Either she found an excuse to fire the contested gardener, or she replaced him in the summer and desired a more effective replacement. It is not surprising that Renée would ask for assistance in hiring a new household employee. Finding and replacing servants was a serious endeavor, and it was normal for references to be taken and many interviews to transpire before a household servant was officially hired.<sup>49</sup> Firing a servant was undertaken with the knowledge that finding an adequate replacement could be a long and difficult process.

Renée used Ripert's skill in household management to help train new employees and to inform them about special circumstances that regularly occurred in the Sade household. In September of 1773, Mazan hired a new guard. Privy to this hire, Renée wrote to Ripert asking that he relay the situation concerning "*l'affaire*" before sending the guard to meet her. Even though this guard was hired to work for Ripert at Mazan, Renée still expected that he be sent to her so that she could meet him. This new guard

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<sup>48</sup> La Marquise de Sade à Ripert, 9 novembre 1773, in Laborde, Vol. VII.

<sup>49</sup> Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 138.

happened to be hired during the time of Donatien's imprisonment following the Marseilles Affair, when the crown issued a *lettre de cachet* against Donatien for the attempted murder of a prostitute in Marseilles. Donatien spent some time in prison, but he managed to escape and existed in hiding and on the run, and during some of his time in hiding he resided at La Coste. Renée explained to Ripert in her letter that:

You should tell him [the new guard], like you did with Sieur Jean, about the necessary discretion so that he does not speak of anything in the house and that his discretion should be the same outside as inside. That is to say that in the house he does not talk of the affair, aware that everyone who lives here ignores it and outside he cannot talk about what he sees and what happens inside.

Renée wanted to make sure that the new guard was apprised of the "situation." She requested that the guard to come as soon as possible without telling anyone where he was going or why.<sup>50</sup> This premium on silence came not from embarrassment or a desire to deny what happened, but because Donatien was hiding from the authorities at La Coste. Renée and Ripert needed to ensure that any new members of the Sade household understood the importance of silence on the subject of the Marseilles Affair and the whereabouts of Donatien, as the authorities actively pursued him. Even speaking of the affair inside the house could be dangerous, as household staff or visitors could have been paid to spy. Renée's collaboration with her husband's hiding demonstrated her desire to keep him at home and out of prison; it appeared as though she set up strict rules governing her servants' behavior concerning household secrets. While she very well may have been embarrassed, ashamed, and angry because of her husband's actions, she still helped hide him in a household full of gossiping servants and workers.

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<sup>50</sup> La Marquise de Sade à Ripert, septembre 1773, in Laborde, Vol. VII.



Renée took a more assertive role in basic household maintenance, giving orders to Ripert rather than seeking his advice or giving him the authority to make decisions in her stead. In overseeing the staff putting the house at Mazan back together after one of her husband's theatre extravaganzas, she asked Ripert for all of the theatre decorations used at Mazan so that she can catalog them and have them all put away.<sup>51</sup> She ordered Ripert to tell the mason at Mazan to take special care in finishing the roof because she has heard that it rains all of the time in the mountains. Ripert was charged with watching the ceiling during the next storm and report the state of the roof to her.<sup>52</sup> When she last visited Mazan, Renée noted that the windows needed painting and that many of the doors did not close properly, including the door to the cellar. To remedy the situation, she granted Ripert the ability to contract the described work to be done.<sup>53</sup> Knowing the skillful and careful way Ripert managed Mazan, even before Renée and Donatien married and Renée assumed her role of the Sade estates, it seemed superfluous for Renée to remind Ripert to pay attention to basics, such as a leaky roof or a busted door. Ripert had been and would continue to monitor these things at Mazan without Renée's reminders or permission to contract necessary repair work. However, the upkeep and appearance of her estates seemed to be sphere were Renée seemed to be comfortable in asserting her opinions. Her orders to Ripert to oversee these tasks, even if they were tasks he would see to without her reminders, helped solidify her role as the overall manager of all Sade estates. Renée seized any opportunity available to involve herself in management because in so many instances she relied on her advisors to take care of things. This

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<sup>51</sup> La Marquise de Sade à Ripert, 6 juin 1773, in Laborde, Vol. VII.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> La Marquise de Sade à Ripert, end of 1773, in Laborde, Vol. VII.

deficit meant that whenever she could, Renée took on a more authoritative manner when corresponding with her advisors, using wording like “*il faut*” [it is necessary] when telling Ripert that the windows should be painted or the roof should be fixed. While a polite and commonly-used phrase, *il faut* connotes an unequivocal necessity and is not a way of asking, but a way of insisting something be done. In this way, she could assert her role as ultimate authority on household matters in the Sade family while still relying on the high level of autonomous decision-making of her advising staff whenever matters required a more experienced manager than she.

Renée’s position as the Sade’s household and estate manager required that she also dealt with issues beyond her immediate, permanent household staff. When Ripert reported that hired workers remodeling Mazan were unhappy with their pay contracts and working conditions, Renée instructed Ripert to hear their grievances and report them to her on their behalf. She even suggested that the workers speak with M. de Causans, a friend whom Donatien had appointed co-seigneur at Mazan.<sup>54</sup> In this situation, Renée avoided direct contact with the disgruntled remodel workers at Mazan, as evidenced by her request that Ripert act as an intermediary between them and her. Her other suggestion was to turn over negotiating with the workers to a completely different party, the co-seigneur who had been appointed by her husband. In that scenario, Renée could trust that Ripert and Causans would find an acceptable solution to the workers’ complaints without her direct involvement. She was curious about their complains, as she was willing to engage with Ripert’s report were he to draw one up. However, she seemed content to let the authorities at Mazan interact with the workers without her

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<sup>54</sup> La Marquise de Sade à Ripert, 12 mai 1774, in Laborde, Vol. VII.

presence. That Ripert alerted her to the situation and did not simply take care of the workers himself without Renée's input demonstrated his recognition of Renée as the final authority on Sade household and estate matters. Despite Renée's consistent reliance on Ripert and his judgment, he continued to keep her informed. While contacting Renée about such problems may have been simply a gesture, as she granted her advisors autonomy over such situations, her advisors did not overstep their boundaries and deny her the role of household and estate manager for the Sade family. Only when Renée refused to engage with the financial situation facing the Sades did they act without her permission or direction, which will be detailed in the next chapter.

The community surrounding La Coste involved Renée in local disputes that she, as the family manager of the region's most influential noble family, was expected to arbitrate. Even into the eighteenth century, prominent noble families in the provinces continued to exert powerful social and political influence locally. This tradition stemmed from centuries of feudal rule by local nobility, and despite the fact that feudal ties had been dissolved in France for centuries, local villages still looked to the château-dwelling, land owning nobles for guidance. The Sade family had been present in Provence since the eleventh century and had produced powerful members of the clerical and Second estates.

In matters of civil contention, the Sades helped mediate solutions, and upon her arrival at La Coste, Renée became the expected mediator, as she resided at La Coste more reliably than did her husband. When called upon to give her opinion on a local matter, she was extremely non-confrontational, as her role as expected arbitrator made her uncomfortable. When a civil dispute between two local villagers, M. de Guiermis and M.

de Vallet, erupted, they turned to Renée to help mediate a solution. It is apparent that Renée did not offer a solution to their problem, either because the argument was resolved before she gave her opinion or because she declined to get involved. Either way, she mentioned to Ripert that she was relieved that the issue had been settled because she did not feel comfortable taking sides.<sup>55</sup> Her relief is palpable in her letter to Ripert:

I am elated, my dear Ripert, that the affair of M. de Guiermis and M. Vallet was settled without me because it could have led to a falling out between me and them if I had to have offended one or the other, and certainly, had I joined in, that would have happened.

Despite having been asked to offer her opinion on the matter by the two men directly involved in the dispute, Renée did not relish the role of arbitrator, knowing that no matter the decision, at least one, if not both of the involved parties would be disgruntled because of her suggestion.

From her letters, it can be gleaned that Renée's possessed a non-confrontational personality, and she preferred to have her more experienced advisors deal with anything that involved possible contention or dispute. Whether it was Gothon and her wild nightly behavior, the gardener and his demands for favors, or two townsmen in need of dispute resolution, Renée found a way to avoid direct involvement and favored having her advisors handle the situation so that she would not be the cause of anyone's hurt feelings. Even though Renée did not cause the contentious relations between de Guiermis and de Vallet, she was reluctant to get involved in their argument because an unsatisfactory outcome would open the possibility for the men to take issue with her. Having such a public profile was alien to Renée, and involving herself in the personal matters of strangers was a new concept to her, one with which she was not naturally comfortable.

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<sup>55</sup> La Marquise de Sade à Ripert, 10 avril 1774, in Laborde, Vol. VII.

As detailed in Chapter One, Renée's relationship with her mother proved to be tempestuous after Renée's marriage to Donatien and move to La Coste. La Présidente, as Renée's mother was known, involved herself in all aspects Donatien's and Renée's lives, including having direct correspondence with the Sade family advisors. La Présidente stayed informed about Renée's life at La Coste through contact with Ripert, Fage, and Gaufridy. La Présidente even convinced Fage to betray Donatien to her and the authorities, a move that, not surprisingly, saw Fage fired from the Sade household. One of Renée's most trusted advisors, Gaufridy, became an important intermediary between Renée and her mother. What had obviously been a troubled relationship between Renée as a child and her ambitious mother grew into a suspicious, tense tug-of-war after Renée married Donatien.

Renée relied on the financial resources of her parents in order to survive, and she had to go to her mother to receive monetary support. This created an awkward tension for Renée, as she needed to sustain a relationship with the woman who arranged for her husband's arrest. La Présidente knew of the Sade's financial problems and used money to insinuate herself into the lives of her daughter and son-in-law. Continual contact with her mother became a necessity for Renée after she assumed responsibility for the Sade household. Donatien's irresponsible spending of money and continued legal fiascos did not help what had become a financially precarious existence for the Sade family. Thus, despite La Présidente's meddling in their lives, circumstances forced Renée and Donatien to maintain a relationship with her. Renée had come to the conclusion that direct contact between her mother and her resulted in frustration and misunderstanding. Such misunderstandings could possibly anger La Présidente and cut off Renée's supply of

financial aid. In addition, Renée did not particularly enjoy subjecting herself to her mother's constant criticisms of Donatien. Renée relied on her advisors to act as a filter between her mother and her, or to give her advice so that Renée could avoid contact with her mother whenever possible.

In order to try to bypass asking her mother directly for money, Renée requested that Ripert, Gaufridy, and another notary come to La Coste to go over the engagement and marriage arrangements drawn up for her and Donatien.<sup>56</sup> The reason for this would most likely to find dowry or any other money that was due Renée by virtue of her marriage. Collection of these funds, which technically would have been Renée's and at her disposal due to the marriage, made it possible to avoid asking La Présidente directly for money. Considering all of the trouble Renee went to in order to help her husband, and the fact that they stayed married for years after this request, it is unlikely she was looking for a way out of the marriage by requesting an in-depth analysis of these documents. Instead, she searched for money that would not require a favor from her mother. While La Présidente granted these financial favors regularly, they did not come without a price, and that price was La Présidente's interference in their lives. The timing of this letter, in early 1774, coincided with when La Présidente, after coercing information from Sade household employees, informed French authorities that Donatien was hiding at La Coste. Because of this, tensions were unusually high between Renée and her mother, and Renée relied on the loyalty and expertise of her advisors to make direct contact with her mother unnecessary.

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<sup>56</sup> La Marquise de Sade à Ripert, février 1774, in Laborde, Vol. VII.

During these years, Renée dealt with her mother indirectly whenever possible, using her advisors as intermediaries. Gaufridy served as the go-between concerning monetary exchanges between daughter and mother. Renée sent correspondences from her mother to him, and La Présidente did the same.<sup>57</sup> For example, La Présidente agreed to pay back to one of Renée’s creditors the 1,800 *livres* that was loaned; when Renée wrote a response to her mother and the bill of surety for the transaction, she sent it to Gaufridy to look over and forward to La Présidente after he “checked every word” so that La Présidente “could not find fault with it.”<sup>58</sup> Gaufridy also replied to La Présidente’s letters on behalf of Renée. Gaufridy would read La Présidente’s letter to Renée, interpret it for Renée in a letter, and await Renée’s response back to him. Using Renée’s response letter as a guide, Gaufridy composed a letter to La Présidente in response to her original missive to Renée. Gaufridy also corresponded directly with Renée’s mother, and because she knew of Gaufridy’s integral role in their communication, La Présidente wrote directly to him as well.

This arrangement put Gaufridy right in the middle of what was considered to be one of the most sacred and intimate epistolary relationships. Before a woman might have, as a teenager or adult, cultivated a written relationship with a lover, her very first epistolary confidante tended to be her mother. This began either when mothers taught their daughters penmanship or when a daughter, sent off to a boarding school, bridged the physical distance from her mother with letters. Mothers could stay informed about the education of their daughters and continue to exert influence over daughters who spent

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<sup>57</sup> For example, see two letters from La Marquise to Gaufridy dated septembre 1775 and 9 octobre 1775 in the Gaufridy Collection, Spencer Research Library Special Collections.

<sup>58</sup> La Marquise de Sade à Gaufridy, 1 janvier 1775, in the Gaufridy Collection, Spencer Research Library Special Collections.

time away at school by writing letters. Mother/daughter correspondence represented a way that mothers could sustain close relationships with daughters who married and moved away. One of the most famous of France's epistolary women, Madame de Sévigné, epitomized this with the copious amount of letters she wrote to her daughter. The inevitability that a daughter would leave home for good meant that mothers began cultivating relationships with daughters that were "mediated by correspondence."<sup>59</sup> In Renée's case, Gaufridy further mediated the correspondence through his interception and re-interpretation of letters written by both women. If a woman's most important epistolary relationship was the one with her mother or her daughter, then Gaufridy occupied this role for both Renée and La Présidente. He not only harbored Renée's financial and legal secrets; he played an important role in what should have been one of her most intimate epistolary relationships.

La Présidente corresponded directly with Renée's other advisors, including Ripert. Despite the fact that La Présidente had grown disillusioned with Donatien and their once close relationship had soured, and that she did not approve of her daughter's continued support of Donatien, La Présidente continued to work behind the scenes to try to mitigate the damage Donatien did to her daughter. Even though La Présidente was angered by the decisions Renée made regarding Donatien's troubles, she did not want to see her family's reputation ruined and collaborated with Sade advisors whenever possible to keep Renée's (and thus the Montreuil's) name from being dragged through the mud. This represented a common goal held by La Présidente and Renée's advisors. La Présidente told Ripert that she had been taking steps to make sure that Renée's rights and

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<sup>59</sup> Dena Goodman, *Becoming a Woman in the Age of Letters* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2009), p. 84.



interests would be upheld, and that she expected that Ripert would help cultivate relationships with important people in the Mazan community to help uphold Renée's rights, despite what was legally happening with Donatien.<sup>60</sup> La Présidente's interests were that Renée not be socially disgraced or lose her local authority in Provence. Donatien's legal fiascos had caused him to become a social pariah; La Présidente wanted to make sure the same thing did not happen to Renée because of her association with her husband. La Présidente mobilized Renée's advisors, men who had influence in the community, to help salvage her daughter's reputation.

The instances when Renée and her mother corresponded directly caused Renée much anxiety. During the course of the trials resulting from the Marseilles Affair, La Présidente wrote to her daughter expressing her anger at her daughter's behavior. La Présidente claimed that she could not be angry with Donatien, despite his outlandish actions, because she had come to the conclusion that, in order to behave in such a way in the first place, Donatien must be crazy, ill, or both. While some kind of disorder rendered her son-in-law incapable of better behavior, La Présidente knew Renée to be in full control of her mental faculties, so her support of her husband was inexplicable. Renée's mother believed she should have known better than to implicitly condone her husband's actions. Renée relayed this direct exchange to Gaufridy, noting, in a triumphant and gleeful manner:

I have been told that my mother loves M. de Sade wildly and that she is much more angry with me than she is with him. I responded with "Tant mieux!" [Too bad! or So much the better!]<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Mme de Montreuil à M. Ripert, Fermier et Viguier de Mme La Marquise de Sade, en sa terre de Mazan, à Mazan par et à Avignon. A Paris, le 26 novembre, 1774," in Laborde, Vol. VII.

<sup>61</sup> La Marquise à M. Gaufridy, Paris, ce 29 juillet 1774, in Laborde, Vol. VII.

Even though La Présidente no longer loved Donatien wildly, she did at the beginning of their marriage. Still, she was angrier with Renée for staying with Donatien than she was with Donatien for behaving the way he did. Renée's tone was proud in this letter, and she relished in telling Gaufridy that she stood up to her mother on her own. However, the fact that she shared this exchange with Gaufridy demonstrated that she wanted him to know what had happened between them, as La Présidente and Gaufridy corresponded directly about Sade family issues. Renée both vented to Gaufridy and kept him in the know in case it was necessary for him to account for her behavior to her mother.

Gaufridy had to balance his loyalty to the Sades with knowing how important Montreuil financial assistance was for them. As discussed in the next chapter, Renée's advisors did not always agree with her financial decisions and tried to find ways to mitigate her poor decisions without supplanting her authority. Gaufridy was responsible for making sure the delicate relationship between mother and daughter did not completely shatter, as that would mean financial ruin for the Sades. At Renée's request and La Présidente's acquiescence, Gaufridy monitored the correspondence-based relationship between mother and daughter, proofing Renée's responses to her mother and filtering La Présidente's wishes and demands back to Renée and Donatien. In this way, Gaufridy was involved in the Sade family's personal interactions.

One of the benefits of having a lawyer as a family friend and household advisor was the availability of abundant legal advice and assistance. A man with the constant level of serious legal trouble that Donatien experienced benefited from a friend like Gaufridy. Likewise, Renée turned to Gaufridy for legal advice pertaining to Donatien and his situations. Donatien's legal troubles became Renée's legal troubles, as Donatien

spent most of his time in hiding at home, on the run, or hiding abroad. Gaufridy provided Renée with legal knowledge, advice, and favors, all aimed at assisting Donatien avoid arrest and imprisonment.

Louis XV issued many *lettres de cachet* on La Présidente's behalf calling for Donatien's immediate arrest and imprisonment for various crimes related to libertinism. *Lettres de cachet*, obtained through a local prosecutor and signed by the king, or issued by the king himself, allowed for the immediate arrest and imprisonment of the person named in the document, without a trial. While *lettres de cachet* became an emblematic symbol of the corruptions of absolutism, as the king could call for the arbitrary arrest of political foes, studies of their procurement have shown that, by the eighteenth century, most *lettres de cachet* were taken out by individuals against other individuals, not by the state against people or groups of people. People of all social classes, from lower to middle to the nobility, used local legal channels to obtain these warrants against family members and neighbors. Most infractions were not political in nature but were in the realm of moral corruption or aberrant behaviors. Economic motives drove many of these *lettres*, but even those complaints had a moral aspect, such as a wife taking out a *lettre* against a husband who drank excessively and engaged in infidelity, which had an economic impact on the family. Scholars have thus viewed *lettres de cachet* as a way of policing morality and protecting family honor.<sup>62</sup> La Présidente's use of *lettres de cachet* against Donatien combined the traditional, elite use of *lettres de cachet* with the more recent implementation of them for the protection of family honor and family finances.

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<sup>62</sup> Arlette Farge and Michel Foucault, *Le Désordre des familles: lettres de cachet des Archives de la Bastille au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, Julliard, 1982).

Gaufridy provided advice on intricate, complicated legal issues, like the nuances of the *lettres de cachet* issued for Donatien's arrest. In 1774, after the Marseilles Affair and the issuing of a new *lettre de cachet* for Donatien's arrest, Renée wrote to Gaufridy asking about the viability of older *lettres de cachet*, since it had been several years since they were initially issued.<sup>63</sup> Renée hoped Gaufridy's knowledge of the law could find Donatien a way to avoid imminent arrest. However, a *lettre de cachet* did not possess a statute of limitations and, thus, never expired in a way that Renée had hoped it would. That several active *letters* calling for Donatien's imprisonment existed at once testified to the government's desire to capture the Marquis. While Renée knew of Donatien's exploits and probably assumed his guilt in the Marseilles Affair, despite Donatien's protests of innocence, she tried to find ways to work within the system to keep him a free man. At this time, Donatien resided at La Coste in hiding, and La Présidente was putting pressure on the Sades to give Donatien over to the authorities.

During the periods when Donatien had to be on the run, Renée confided in her advisors, giving them sensitive information about his intentions and locations. Despite Renée's attempts at hiding her husband and finding a legal loophole in the call for his arrest, authorities eventually raided La Coste and arrested Donatien. He soon escaped from his prison cell and lived underground in northern Italy. Renée made sure that Ripert and Gaufridy knew of Donatien's whereabouts while out of the country.<sup>64</sup> Renée even went so far as to share with Ripert Donatien's pseudonym while traveling—"Monsieur le

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<sup>63</sup> La Marquise de Sade à Gaufridy, 24 janvier 1774, in the Gaufridy Collection at Spencer Research Library Special Collections, University of Kansas.

<sup>64</sup> La Marquise de Sade à Ripert, 17 mars 1774 in Laborde, Vol. VII.

cura.”<sup>65</sup> Donatien’s locations in hiding and the name he used in his correspondence back home were extremely sensitive information. The French authorities actively sought him, and Renée’s mother encouraged and aided their pursuit. That Renée would share this information with her household advisors reflects their importance to her and Donatien and the nature of her relationship with them. Sharing family secrets, especially ones as sensitive as Donatien’s flight from the law, demonstrates the close, familiar relationship Renée had cultivated with these men and the necessary roles they played in her and Donatien’s lives. She and Donatien trusted them absolutely, and both Renée and her husband wrote to them and shared information about Donatien during his Italian sojourn. This absolute trust helps explain why Fage’s betrayal of Donatien in 1774 stung Renée and Donatien, as up until that point he had been as trusted an advisor as Ripert and Gaufridy. While members of the household at La Coste needed to know why discretion was necessary during Donatien’s stay there, Renée did not share his locations and code names with everyone. She reserved this information for only her most trusted advisors, those she knew to whom Donatien would also correspond and from whom she would require extra assistance during his absence.

As her husband’s indiscretions became more problematic, Renée took an active role in financially and legally aiding her fugitive husband and co-opted her advisors in providing such assistance to him as well. Rather expectedly, Donatien found trouble while on the lam in Italy. Somewhere in Italy, his true identity was discovered, and he had to flee immediately, thus leaving his money and belongings behind. In order to assist him with the problems associated with this discovery and sudden flight, Renée turned to

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<sup>65</sup> La Marquise de Sade à Ripert, 19 mars 1774 in Laborde, Vol. VII.

her advisors to offer assistance and support. Donatien requested 1,500 *livres* from Renée because he had to leave his money in his old hiding place. Renée then sent the monetary request on to Ripert, with the caution that he procure and send Donatien the money without arousing suspicion that they were in the process of aiding the fugitive Marquis.<sup>66</sup> Later that year, in November, Renée wrote to Ripert to alert him that the *maréchaussée* of Marseille had shown up at La Coste with a *lettre de cachet*, intending to apprehend Donatien. Renée instructed Ripert to write to Donatien letting him know of this incident, as Ripert knew where to direct any correspondence to Donatien while he was in hiding, demonstrating the sensitive information she was comfortable sharing with Ripert.<sup>67</sup>

In November, Renée again made Gaufridy an accomplice to Donatien when she alerted Gaufridy that he would soon receive a letter asking if “M. le comte de Mazan” is the same as “Marquis de Sade.” The Marquis de Sade owned the château of Mazan, but Renée wanted Gaufridy to tell “*un petit mensonge*” and say that there are many Sade families and he could not say for sure which M. Sade is the Marquis and which is the comte of Mazan.<sup>68</sup> Both Renée and Gaufridy well knew that whomever wanted this information was trying to find Donatien, and that claiming he was not the comte de Mazan constituted a lie; however, they would not give up his identity. Gaufridy’s loyalty to the Sades suggests that he was willing to lie, even in Renée’s sly way, to keep Donatien from being discovered. Gaufridy’s possible motivations to lie were both his loyalty to Donatien, as a personal friend, and the knowledge that Donatien’s arrest would instigate social and financial issues for Renée.

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<sup>66</sup> La Marquise de Sade à Ripert, 12 mai 1774 in Laborde, Vol. VII.

<sup>67</sup> La Marquise à M. Ripert, janvier 1774 in Laborde, Vol. VII.

<sup>68</sup> La Marquise de Sade à Gaufridy, november 1774, in Laborde, Vol. VII.

Renée did more for her husband than hide his whereabouts and send him supplies from La Coste; she took an active role in trying to resolve his legal problems, and she called upon her advisors to assist her in these endeavors on Donatien's behalf. In the summer of 1774, Renée decided create a clean slate by paying off her creditors and hiring an entirely new household staff, but before she could do this, she needed to attend to Donatien's trial and imprisonment. During her absence from La Coste, while in Paris and then making frequent stops on the way back to meet with potential new domestics, Renée made it clear that Gaufridy would be the channel through which anyone could reach her. She told Ripert that she would not be receiving or seeing anyone during this period and that the only way for him, or anyone else, to reach her would be through "le canal de Gaufridy," who was in Apt.<sup>69</sup> In this way, Gaufridy was given the responsibility of dealing with Renée's affairs in her absence.

Renée traveled to Paris to attempt to legally put and end to her husband's felon and fugitive status, and she needed Gaufridy's expertise to help her understand what was happening in the court.<sup>70</sup> In July of 1774, she traveled alone to Paris, hoping to meet with the King's prosecutor and the *parlement* of Paris to discuss her husband's criminal activity, as well as the financial strain it put upon her.<sup>71</sup> Her desire to have Donatien's matter solved hit a minor roadblock, as she felt the entanglements between Maupeou and the *parlement* of Paris took the emphasis off Donatien's case, or any case that was not related to the recent parliamentary imbroglio.<sup>72</sup> As she relayed to Gaufridy, "the upheaval

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<sup>69</sup> La Marquise à M. Ripert, Le Coste, ce 26 novembre 1774, in Laborde, Vol. VII.

<sup>70</sup> La Marquise de Sade à Ripert, 16 julliet 1774, in Laborde, Vol. VII.

<sup>71</sup> La Marquise de Sade à Gaufridy, 29 julliet 1774, in the Gaufridy Collection, Spencer Research Library.

<sup>72</sup> La Marquisde de Sade à Gaufridy, 3 septembre 1774, in Laborde, Vol. VII.

makes it so that, at this moment, no one wants to hear anything except for affairs of the state.” The timing of Donatien’s trial unfortunately coincided with the downfall of Maupeou and the re-institution of the previous *parlement*. Renée’s comments on the situation demonstrated at least basic knowledge of wider political affairs, although her concern about them stemmed from how such affairs affected her family. When Donatien’s case was finally heard, Renée reported to Gaufridy that the prosecution’s case was falling apart because many of the accusations could not be proved with witnesses, and the accusation of pederasty fell apart completely, meaning that one charge against him had been totally removed.<sup>73</sup> She felt optimistic that if the court threw out one charge because it was weak, others could follow. Renée kept up with the trial and regularly sent news back to Gaufridy. She asked for his interpretation of events, predictions based on the way the case unfolded, and for any advice he might have to assist Donatien.

Renée used Gaufridy’s contacts, as he was a magistrate in Aix, to help in the aftermath of Donatien’s trial. Even though much of the case against Donatien was falling apart, as many of the charges were trumped up and a result of hysteria, Renée realized that public opinion in Paris and in Provence was against her husband. However, the

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The period of the Maupeou *parlement* refers to the period between January of 1771 and August of 1774. Maupeou, the former *président* of the *parlement* of Paris and current chief minister to Louis XV, decided to ally himself with Louis XV in a dispute between the king and the *parlements* of France. The royal government sought to reform the tax system by levying taxes upon the previously exempt noble classes, and the *parlements* protested by enacting a judicial strike. As chief minister, Maupeou demanded that the striking magistrates return to work; the majority of them did not return and were exiled by *lettres de cachet*. In their absence, Maupeou set up a new network of courts to administer Paris, including a smaller version of the *parlement* of Paris, and suppressed two provincial *parlements*. Maupeou’s new courts were staffed not by hereditary members of the *noblesse de robe*, but by salaried professional judges. Maupeou’s system came to an end upon Louis XV’s death and the ascension of Louis XVI, as Maupeou’s enemies used the time of transition to restore the old system of noble judges and noble financial privilege. Louis XVI officially ended the Maupeou experiment in 1774.

<sup>73</sup> La Marquise de Sade à Gaufridy, aout 1774, in Laborde, Vol. VII.



issued *lettres de cachet* still demanded Donatien's arrest, and the *parlement* considered handing down the harsh judgment of *mort civile*, and to do so in absentia, as Donatien remained in hiding after his escape from Miolans. Renée solicited Gaufridy to try to rally his fellow judges in the *parlement* of Aix to help bring the Marquis back to life after the discussion of "*mort civilement* [sic]." <sup>74</sup> As a *parlementaire* in Provence, Gaufridy possessed influence in local legal matters and was, by virtue of his two professions as lawyer and notary, well-connected in the region. Renée asked that he rally his friends to help save Donatien's reputation after the *parlement* of Paris indicated they might declare him to be civilly dead, or stripped of his status as a citizen and of his basic civil rights. To be declared such by a court meant that one became *persona non grata*. Those declared civilly dead could face penalties such as the cancelation of registered wills, which would mean that a person would die intestate, or the legal repossession of all goods and property, which could be redistributed to a person's children or the state. <sup>75</sup> That the *parlement* would consider such a sentence for an influential nobleman, a sentence usually reserved for those sentenced to death or deportees, serves as evidence of the frustration Donatien's repeated offending and escaping from prison engendered.

While Gaufridy could not do anything to influence the *parlement*, he did try to help Renée as much as possible by explaining events that confused her or offering her

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid. While the official sentence handed down by the court is *mort civile*, Renée used the term *mort civilement* in her letter.

<sup>75</sup> The *parlement* did not declare Donatien civilly dead until 1777. However, a few weeks after his return to Paris that year, he was captured and imprisoned. The charge of civil death was revoked, probably partly due to La Présidente's influence. Such a charge could potentially hurt Renée and her children, as the revocation of Donatien's will and the redistribution of Sade property was up to the government. La Présidente was surely pacified by his capture and his imprisonment, as were the authorities. Donatien's short-lived sentence, however, served as a marker of La Présidente's influence and Louis XV's serious intolerance of libertinism.

advice. Gaufridy's advice was sometimes helpful and practical, but mostly it represented a desire to comfort Renée in the face of an unpromising situation. Gaufridy understood the kind of trouble Donatien faced and the hardships that meant for his wife socially, financially, and legally. He did not offer her false hope but instead tried to prepare her for Donatien's inevitable imprisonment and strategize how to minimize the negative affects this would have on the household at La Coste. When Donatien returned home in 1774, Renée realized the negative financial and social impacts that the last few years had on their reputation, and she, exasperated, complained to Gaufridy that Donatien did not want to talk about anything negative and that he would not pay attention to anything "disagreeable."<sup>76</sup> Renée appealed to him to help with Donatien's casual attitude both because Gaufridy served as a counselor and friend.

Unfortunately, Renée's attempt to make a fresh start in 1774 ultimately failed. On her journey back to Provence from Paris, Renée hired a new household staff and optimistically hoped to confer with Gaufridy on a new financial system. Donatien returned to La Coste in the fall of 1774, after having spent most of the year in hiding. Predictably, however, Donatien engaged in his familiar old behaviors, and he included many of the young new members of La Coste's domestic staff in his exploits. Some of the young servants, in collusion with their parents, lodged formal complaints against the Sades, including charges of kidnapping and sexual mistreatment. While La Présidente ordinarily would have jumped at the chance to see Donatien imprisoned (and in fact he technically still existed in hiding at this point, his arrest possible by one of her outstanding *lettres de cachet*), the potential harm such a scandal could do Renée's

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<sup>76</sup> La Marquise de Sade à Gaufridy, octobre 1775, in the Gaufridy Collection, Spencer Research Library.

reputation led La Présidente to instead imprison the ringleader of the accusations via *lettre de cachet*. This move forced the other servants and families to denounce the official charges they had made. Domestic relations remained tense, however, and in 1776 the cook tried to kill Donatien. This, coupled with Donatien's mother's terminal illness, led the Sades to leave La Coste for Paris in 1777.<sup>77</sup> The family would never return to the château, although Donatien did alone on a few occasions during his subsequent flights from authorities.

This chapter has detailed the important role of advisors in the day-to-day household management of the château and estates of La Coste. Advisors of varied titles, occupations, and social classes aided Renée in important aspects of her domestic duties. The legal issues raised by her husband added another element to the responsibilities Renée faced on a regular basis. She relied on and learned from her advisors, as she assumed the role of household manager without the necessary educational and life experiences to handle her responsibilities on her own. The deliberate, carefully-constructed use of a team of advisors represented one way that a noblewoman could overcome her lack of preparation for household and estate management. The next chapter will detail one crucial element of household management that has not been touched upon in this discussion—the financial responsibilities inherent to managing a provincial noble household and estate.

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<sup>77</sup> By the time the Sades packed up and left for Paris at the end of January 1777, Donatien's mother had been dead for two weeks. He never received official notice, however, so he believed he was leaving to see her on her deathbed.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### “Il faut de l’ordre et de l’économie; voilà mon plan”: Provincial Noblewomen and Credit Networks

#### Eighteenth-Century French Economy and Credit

The word “credit” carries several connotations. To speak of someone’s credit is to judge his or her believability, reliability, character, and truthfulness. It refers to a critical element of someone’s inherent nature, personality, and morality. To give someone credit means acknowledging someone’s work or contribution, usually in a positive manner. People desire to take credit for something favorable or flattering. In a financial sense, credit denotes currency of a non-bullion nature. Often, credit possesses a close relationship to the concept of interest, the idea that currency used in an exchange naturally increases in value over time. This concept is very familiar to modern people, with the ubiquitous use of loans, bonds, and credit cards in financial transactions. What economic historians have recovered is that non-bullion, “paper” transactions carrying interest characterized many early modern transactions among individuals and institutions.

Most historical work on economies for this period has been undertaken on behalf of the British and Dutch financial landscapes.<sup>1</sup> Both Britain and the Netherlands pioneered the creation of centralized and rationalized banking institutions in Europe. The high volume of Dutch commerce spurred on the creation of centralized banking structures in the Netherlands. Many forces converged to help create the centralized banking system in Britain, including early industrialization, the cost of military ventures, and tense

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<sup>1</sup> For example, see Margot C. Finn, *The Character of Credit: Personal Debt in English Culture, 1740-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) and Craig Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation: The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England* (London: Palgrave, 1998).

relations among political parties. The Bank of England was founded in 1694 to loan money to the royal government to assist with bolstering the British Navy. The bank became central to politics throughout the course of the eighteenth century, as banking and credit became a political tool in the struggle between the Whigs and Tories. In contrast, France did not possess the high volume of commerce that characterized the Netherlands, nor did the absolutist monarchy allow for the same political dynamics that existed in Britain.

The financial landscape of pre-Revolutionary France has garnered comparably less scholarly attention. While scholarship has explored the contributions France's economic condition made to the onset of the Revolution, studies of the day-to-day financial world inhabited by individual French men and women have only just recently begun to surface.<sup>2</sup> Some of the factors contributing to the uneven scholarship on France are the comparable lack of industrialization in France during the eighteenth century and the lack of a national banking system until the reign of Napoleon. As historians have begun to reclaim the financial lives of individuals, the resulting "elaborate reconstructions of family budgets...almost entirely disregard the role of credit, even while the reality of widespread indebtedness is well known."<sup>3</sup> Julie Hardwick's recently published work on family economies focuses on the important role credit played in household economics of the urban, working classes. She sought to fill the gap remarked upon by Steven Laurence Kaplan, that, while historians have discussed the concept of credit on macro, national levels, they "have uncovered much less about how it engulfed

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<sup>2</sup> For example, see Julie Hardwick, *Family Business: Litigation and the Political Economies of Daily Life in Early Modern France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Hardwick, p. 9.

daily life.” This chapter adds to this discussion of credit on a micro level through an analysis of the financial actions of provincial noblewomen.

The concept of credit and the related concept of interest first developed in ancient Mesopotamia, when livestock was the main source of currency for financial transactions. Because livestock would naturally reproduce, and thus increase, over the course of a year, a loan of a limited number of livestock would actually enlarge. This concept has been used to explain the development of the concept of interest in money transactions.<sup>4</sup> While the history of credit, as well as its close association with Jewish lenders and anti-Semitism, has been well documented, and it is accepted that by the eighteenth century, most European economies had embraced the concept of credit and interest when the need for paper money became apparent. As markets increased, both domestically and internationally, the accumulation of actual metal could not keep up with this expansion. As economic historian Thomas Lockett has noted, the financial world of eighteenth-century Europe developed a complicated web of concepts and terminology related to non-bullion financial transactions.<sup>5</sup> While the commercial classes, those involved in business and finance as a profession, mostly used these terms, certain modes of credit were familiar to those involved in non-professional economic transactions.

The two most common types of credit exchanged among individuals, in the absence of a centralized national bank in France, were the *billet de commerce* and the *lettre de change*. A *billet de commerce* allowed for credit transactions between a lender and borrower within the same city, and thus facilitated very local economic exchange.

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<sup>4</sup> Niall Ferguson, *The Ascent of Money: A Financial History of the World* (New York: Penguin Books, Ltd., 2008).

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Manley Lockett, *Credit and Commercial Society in France, 1740-1789*, unpublished dissertation. Princeton University, 1992. Chapter 1: “A Culture of the Comptoir.”

The *lettre de change*, on the other hand—the instrument favored by Renée and other individual consumers—allowed for payments and repayments to be made over a larger geographic area, from regional to national and international scales.<sup>6</sup> Essentially, *lettres de change* functioned as IOUs that carried interest and the promise of a schedule of repayment. Neither of these forms of paper money was backed by specie, and these forms of credit could be used in multiple transactions; they began to be traded in the same manner as specie money. So developed the practice of endorsement, or the paying of a paper IOU with another paper IOU. This parallels the modern equivalent of paying off a credit card with another credit card. Such a piece of credit could change hands ten to fifteen times before it became due to the original debtor.<sup>7</sup> This type of paper money credit was essential to the financial landscape of eighteenth-century France. However, credit was used not only by merchants and businessmen, but also by individuals charged with the maintenance and management of households and estates.

### **Women and Finance in the Eighteenth Century**

Despite the recent interest in the financial lives of individuals and family units during the early modern period and eighteenth century, studies that include or focus exclusively on women possess two significant limitations. First, the women most studied have been either unmarried women or widows, as the legal restrictions put upon married women during this period make extracting a woman's actions from those of her husband

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<sup>6</sup> Thomas M. Lockett, "'There is No More Money Here': Money Famine and Revolt in Early Modern France," in John Louis DiGaetani, ed., *Money: Lure, Lore, and Literature* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), p. 79.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

difficult.<sup>8</sup> While specific legal codes varied across France, in general, it has been observed that France allowed a high level of legal autonomy to unmarried women of majority age, widows, and women who operated their own businesses.<sup>9</sup> In contrast, the husbands of married women were expected to make household decisions, especially those of a legal or financial nature. Therefore, recreating the decisions made by a married woman can prove to be a difficult task, as these were veiled by the need for consent from her husband.

Secondly, the economic activities of women that are the easiest to identify and consequently have been the best documented in historical work are “positive” activities, such as inheriting money or property, contributing to the family economy through work, or maintaining property for and passing it down to subsequent generations.<sup>10</sup> The role of women as debt-makers remains less explored. Even as historians are beginning to acknowledge the ubiquity of debt in eighteenth century France, as well as the fact that such debt served an important function in personal and local economies, the role of women in credit networks and in incurring debt, especially married women, still needs to be explored.<sup>11</sup> The household represents an appropriate site for investigating married women and the creation of debt. Clare Crowston has pointed out that, despite the existence of either written laws or customary laws that prohibited women from making financial decisions alone, without male approval, it was common practice for women to

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<sup>8</sup> Clare Crowston, “Family Affairs: Wives, Credit, Consumption, and Law in Old Regime France,” in Susan Desan and Jeffery Merrick, eds., *Family, Gender, and Law in Early Modern France* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009), p. 64-65.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, p. 65.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, p. 64-65.

<sup>11</sup> See Hardwick.



be allowed to take on household-related provisioning on their own, as husbands did not realistically expect to have to approve every little purchase made for the home.<sup>12</sup> For these purposes, then, women could make purchases and engage debt through provisioning the household on credit. Married women signed legal documents and acquired debt for household purposes without male consent. An analysis of household management, then, can help overcome the dearth of scholarship on the debt-making practices of married women

A study of household management during this period illuminates the roles that women and their advisors played in debit/credit networks. In close concert with advisors, such as lawyers, notaries, and experienced staff members, women participated in and contributed to local and regional credit networks. As has been noted, “female participation [in credit/debt networks] was central not only to an exchange complex involving women, but to debts of all kinds and all sizes, and to all stages of the debt cycle.”<sup>13</sup> The financial access that notaries gave to women was crucial to their ability to manage their households and properties. An analysis of Renée’s financial management during the periods of Donatien’s absence from La Coste, as well as examples from other noblewomen who were responsible for provincial estates and households, illustrates the existence of and impact of female financial managers on households. Whether or not the women were efficient and effective as managers, they contributed to economies beyond their immediate households with the assistance of their advisors.

In the eight-month period between October 1771 and June 1772, Donatien lived at La Coste with his wife and family. During this period when Donatien inhabited the

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<sup>12</sup> Crowston, p. 70-71.

<sup>13</sup> Hardwick, p. 142.

château, the majority of correspondence depicting financial matters involved him instead of Renée. This, however, changed in his absences, as Renée assumed sole responsibility for managing the Sade household and properties. The financial situation that Donatien bequeathed his wife upon his departure from La Coste was less than ideal. In early September, Donatien had sold one of his *pensions* to a family friend in order to earn quick cash.<sup>14</sup> Just a few months later, in November, Fage wrote to Ripert that they needed to discuss money. Donatien had given Fage a *lettre de change* worth 1,500 *livres* but had asked him to secure another *lettre de change* for 2,500 *livres* that would go into effect after January 1.<sup>15</sup> However, the 1,500 *livre* bill of credit was not sufficient to secure a larger amount, and Donatien had left his lawyer no other collateral to secure a new amount. To further complicate matters, the 1,500 *livre lettre de change* was destined to go to one of Donatien's creditors, and therefore could not be used to secure this new line of credit. Fage had promised to make a payment to the "Jew of Carpentras," one of the Sade's perpetual creditors. It seems as though Donatien expected his lawyer to pay off two creditors and secure a new line of credit with only a 1,500 *livre lettre de change* that had already been promised to one of the creditors.

This situation reveals that Donatien left Renée a tradition of using bills of credit in order to pay off and secure new bills of credit, the practice known as endorsement. The fact that Fage went to Ripert for assistance in finding more money indicated that Donatien was not interested in himself finding solutions to his financial problems but

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<sup>14</sup> Transaction passée entre M. de Brancas et M. de Sade, 5 septembre 1771, in Alice M. Laborde, *Correspondances du marquis de Sade et de ses proches enrichies de documents, notes et commentaries, vol. V. oct. 1771-27 juin 1772, le marquis et la marquise de Sade au château de la Coste* (Geneva: Editions Slatkine, 1994).

<sup>15</sup> M. Fage à M. Ripert 9 novembre 1771, in Laborde, Volume V.

instead expected this advisors and experts to fix the situation for him. Donatien made financial demands, however unrealistic, and the Sade advisors found a way to at least nominally meet those demands. While Renée was not as whimsical and flippant as her husband when it came to financial matters, she inherited a situation where reliance on her advisors was the norm. Because of Donatien's disregard for finances, the Sade family consistently lived in a state of financial strain; more money left the household than came in. This situation accounted for Renée's and Donatien's constant borrowing and paying for household items, staff salaries, and property expenses with credit.

As Donatien did not work (which was customary and expected of a man of his social standing), could not spend time at court seeking favors because of his felon status, and did not earn income from his writing, the money that entered the Sade household came from leased properties, *rentes*, and estate agricultural output. The *rente* had been a popular kind of loan since the medieval period. *Rentes* could be arranged between individuals, or between individuals and the government. Essentially, a *rente* was a loan, usually for a larger amount of money than a *lettre de change*, that carried interest and operated as an annuity, so that regular fixed payments, including interest, were re-paid to the lender. What made *rentes* popular among borrowers (or "sellers" of the *rente*) was that, in order to circumvent usury laws, the lender (or "buyer") could not demand immediate repayment of the entire amount of the loan as long as enough payment to cover the interest had been made on time. Thus, these were relatively safe for sellers. In addition, buyers were, in theory, guaranteed some form of regular payment, and the longer it took a seller to pay back the amount, the more interest a buyer would receive in the end. Interestingly, the *rentes* that were perceived to be the most risky were not those

sold by individuals, but those sold by the Crown, as the government possessed notoriously capricious finances. Those who bought from the government often tried to find a reliably solvent intermediary to vouch for the government in the case of a government default on the payments.

On average, about 5,800 *livres* per year came in from Sade properties.<sup>16</sup> While other income may have been garnered as well, the majority of the non-loaned money available for Donatien and Renée to spend came from property income. The income that the Sades received from their *rentes*, while probably regular and reliable, was minor, as only a payment equal to cover the fixed period's interest was required by law. In addition, if the Sades borrowed ahead on their *rente* payments, they would have essentially spent money that had not yet come to them, the amount of which was not guaranteed.

To gather an idea of, on average, how much money the Sades spent, a collation of receipts from the spring of 1772 (March through May) indicated that they spent little over 4,000 *livres* on food and clothing items; entertainment, including theatrical productions undertaken by Donatien; and property maintenance. This did not include any salary paid to regular household staff. In this period, staff were not necessarily paid a regular salary but were instead reimbursed at the end of the term of service as a way of saving money.<sup>17</sup> Eventually, though, a lump sum would have to have been paid to any servants who left or whose contracts had come to an end. In addition, by this period, Donatien and Renée had

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<sup>16</sup> Laborde, Volume V, p. 57.

<sup>17</sup> Hardwick, p. 138. It appeared as though the Sades did have trouble making final payments to their staff members, as evidenced by the accusations by staff members that they were not paid for their services (Chapter One).

become responsible for the Comte de Sade's considerable debts. Thus, Renée and Donatien spent in one season nearly the majority of their yearly income.

In order to continue to finance their provincial noble lifestyle, then, Renée and her husband relied on lines of credit to stay afloat. These creditors ranged from family members to local and regional men and women who profited from the potential for interest payments through extending lines of credit to those in need. Renée expected that her advisors would find willing creditors to lend to her, and these advisors even occasionally floated loans to her themselves. While it might seem odd that a noble family who had servants borrowed from those servants, studies of household finances have demonstrated that it was not uncommon for people who employed servants or household staff to use them as a means of securing further financial resources. However, the existing studies of this phenomenon have been limited to the urban, middling classes.<sup>18</sup> Renée's interaction with her advisors and staff served as evidence that this occurred even within aristocratic levels of society. Creditors became the cause of the financial strain that Renée and her advisors spent most of their trying to alleviate.

In the midst of the tight finances at La Coste, Renée began a habit that would endure until she and Donatien left Provence in 1777. Despite financial hardship, Renée continued to stock La Coste with the luxury items that were to Donatien's liking. One bill dated during Donatien's eight months of constant residence during this period, requested from Ripert the delivery of duck, rabbit, roasts, cheeses, lamb, fats, fruits, vegetables, and new shoes. This one delivery totaled 157 *livres*, and purchases of this

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 137-139.

nature were made several times each season, sometimes several times each month.<sup>19</sup>

While Renée did not regularly purchase such items when she was at La Coste alone, these purchases were regular when Donatien was around. This can be attributed both to Donatien's expectations, as his behavior suggested that he felt entitled to a lavish lifestyle that upheld the reputation of the provincial nobility.<sup>20</sup> The purchase and consumption of luxury items had characterized the traditional noble classes. Especially in rural Provence, where the Sade family had historically strong feudal ties and still by the eighteenth century served as a local authority, it was integral to the family's reputation that others witness expected patterns of consumption. Renée tried to limit some of this in her husband's absence, as she indulged his tastes and expectations when he was in residence at La Coste. In fact, one way to track Donatien's whereabouts during his times on the lam is to read the supply lists that Renée sent to Gaufridy and Ripert. These lists indicated when Donatien was in hiding at La Coste and when he was away and Renée was solely responsible for the household.

Donatien's behavior and legal problems led to an important decision undertaken by the family at the end of 1772, which was reported by Donatien's uncle, L'abbé de Sade, to Fage at the beginning of 1773. Renée had been named the official administrator of all Sade goods and possessions and had obtained primary guardianship of her children.<sup>21</sup> This *conseil de famille* decision made official what had been unofficial up until that point, which was that, in Donatien's absence, Renée was responsible for the

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<sup>19</sup> Compte pour la marquise dressé par M. Ripert, printemps 1772, in Laborde, Vol. V.

<sup>20</sup> For a discussion of provincial nobility and issues of reputation in the eighteenth century, see Chapter One.

<sup>21</sup> L'abbé de Sade à M. Fage, 15 janvier 1773, in Alice M. Laborde, *Correspondances du marquis de Sade et de ses proches enrichies de documents, notes et commentaries, vol. VII. 1773-1776, la vie quotidienne au château de La Coste* (Geneva: Editions Slatkine, 1994).

household and estates. Even when Donatien was present at La Coste during these years, his presence needed to be kept secret, as he was hiding from authorities. The financial matters of the Sade family became Renée's responsibility despite her inexperience in this area and the poor example set by Donatien when he did dabble in these matters.

Renée spent most of her time as financial manager of the Sade properties dealing with her two main creditors: a Jewish lender from Carpentras, Abraham Crémieux, and M. Brémond from Grenoble. While Renée was deeply in debt to both men, and equally unable to pay them back satisfactorily, the manner in which Renée, Gaufridy, Fage, and Ripert spoke of these two men was strikingly different. Renée and her advisors never used Crémieux's name in the correspondence concerning him; he is referred to as the Jew of Carpentras, the Jew, or "the tyrant" by an exasperated Fage.<sup>22</sup> The tone of the letters referring to Crémieux and his demands for repayment demonstrate that they found his requests to be mean, petty, and unreasonable. Certainly this can be attributed to the fact that he was Jewish and the frustration on the part of the Sade family and advisors at being financially beholden to a Jewish lender.

In contrast, the correspondence between Renée's advisors and Brémond was more amicable. Most correspondence occurred between a Sade advisor and Brémond's *homme d'affaire* M. Mefferey, a magistrate in Avignon who played a similar role for Brémond as Gaufridy did for the Sades. An excerpt from a letter written by Mefferey to Ripert illustrated the polite, respectful tone of their exchanges. In this situation, Ripert was going to Avignon to meet Mefferey in person, in an attempt to broker a solution to Renée's lack of repayment to Brémond. Mefferey told Ripert:

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<sup>22</sup> M. Fage à M. Ripert, 16 mars 1773, in Laborde, Vol. VII.

If you would be so kind as to come there [Avignon] yourself the day [arranged for the meeting], after having found a way to completely resolve this affair. I will be there myself, and I will do everything I possibly can to arrange for you. M. Brémond is very anxious [to resolve this situation].<sup>23</sup>

Also, the correspondence indicated that Donatien and Renée began borrowing from Brémond through Ripert, who had a previous connection with or knowledge of Brémond and his lending abilities. Thus, the borrowing that took place between the Sades and Brémond was due to a mutual acquaintance; Jewish lenders, on the other hand, had a reputation for lending to anyone as long as it could be of advantage to them.

Renée's most common way of dealing with her creditors was to give Fage, Gaufridy, and Ripert a high degree of autonomy when securing credit for her and pacifying creditors needing to be paid. The three men, then, wrote to each other about finding solutions to Renée's money problems, and Renée only rarely participated in these exchanges. After one of the numerous instances in which she tasked her advisors with finding a solution to her credit problems, Renée wrote to Ripert, saying:

I hope that were able to yourself make an arrangement with M. Brémond during your trip to Carpentras. I haven't yet received a response from M. Fage about what was done, and I still do not know what you two agreed upon together.<sup>24</sup>

In this case, it was clear that Ripert and Fage concocted a solution to one of the many Brémond situations without Renée's input and without immediately informing her of what they did. In her letter, she did not admonish them for this, nor did she directly ask them what they had come up with. She simply stated that she had not heard either way what the arrangement was supposed to be and if Brémond accepted it. This indirect

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<sup>23</sup> M. Mefferey à M. Ripert, Avignon, ce 12 may 1773, in Laborde Vol. VII.

<sup>24</sup> La Marquise à M. Ripert, La Coste, 20 mai 1773, in Laborde Vol. VII.



monitoring of her advisor's actions allowed Renée to remain informed and assert her ultimate authority while giving her advisors enough room to take necessary action in interacting with her creditors.

When the Jewish lender from Carpentras persisted in asking for payment, Fage wrote to Ripert so the two of them could strategize how to make this creditor wait longer for the repayment of the debt. Fage suggested either offering to pay only part of the amount owed or finding another *lettre de change* so that money could be passed on to the Crémieux.<sup>25</sup> In this same letter, Fage reported to Ripert that he had made Renée aware of the situation and asked her what she wanted them to do. She responded that she was traveling at the moment and would not return to La Coste until the next month. As her letter to Fage was postmarked from Lyon, she was in the middle of a trip away from La Coste. Renée, in this situation, did not seem too concerned about finances, as she did not offer to come home early to deal with the situation, nor did she offer a solution. She actually did not even tell Fage to take care of it; she seemed to feel as though such issues should not trouble her while she was away. In the absence of any guidance from Renée, Fage told Ripert that now that Madame (Renée) has been named administrator of the Sade estates, they act on her behalf and they cannot wait for her return to come up with a solution. Fage suggested that Ripert contact Mefferey to see if Brémond would be willing to lend them money to pass on to the Jew, as this would “help us to bind the hands of the tyrant.”<sup>26</sup> The decision to use a new line of credit from Brémond to pay Crémieux was undertaken without Renée's guidance or input.

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<sup>25</sup> M. Fage à M. Ripert, 16 mars 1773, in Laborde, Vol. VII.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

Unfortunately, Renée's dealings with Brémond had become rather tense, due to her habit of continually borrowing money from him and failing to pay it back. Most of the contact between Renée and Brémond actually took place between one of Renée's advisors and Mefferey. Mefferey informed Ripert that, unless one of the *lettres de change* exchanged between the two parties was settled within the next week, Brémond would be forced to take judicial action against Renée.<sup>27</sup>

Typically, the threat of judicial prosecution was enough to convince a debtor to pay back the money. Rarely did such matters actually reach a financial court; instead, the threat of a lawsuit acted as a motivating device for creditors to expedite payment from their debtors. No immediate judicial action was taken on Brémond's part, and a few months later Mefferey wrote again to Ripert, saying he had received another letter from Brémond, again threatening judicial retaliation. Unless the sum was "*absolument payé*," Mefferey had been ordered to take legal action "*selon toute la rigueur des lois*." Mefferey expressed that both he and Brémond would like to avoid this at all costs; in fact, Mefferey was even upset with Ripert that he and the Sades, through their non-compliance with the *lettre de change*, had forced the situation to become this serious.<sup>28</sup> Apparently Brémond had rejected any of the ideas Ripert and Fage had concocted to delay payment, and Mefferey informed Ripert that if the matter was not concluded to Brémond's satisfaction by Friday, judicial action would immediately commence.

Despite the gravity of the situation, Renée did not seem overly concerned with Brémond's threats and left resolution up to her advisors. In one of her letters to Ripert in May of 1773, the majority of the letter arranged for the transportation of a bed for

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<sup>27</sup> M. Mefferey à M. Ripert, 12 mars 1773, in Laborde, Vol. VII.

<sup>28</sup> M. Mefferey à M. Ripert, 17 mai 1773, in Laborde, Vol. VII.

Doantien from Mazan to La Coste. She wanted it to ship out on the first day the weather would permit. At the end of the letter, she made one comment to Ripert about how, during his upcoming trip to Carpentras, he could try to make arrangements with Brémond or his representative.<sup>29</sup> Renée seemed more concerned with making sure the house was in the right condition to please Donatien, and that his favorite furniture had arrived, than she was with the escalating situation with Brémond.

Eventually, however, Ripert, Fage, and Gaufridy found a way to prevent Brémond from initiating legal proceedings against Renée. During this time, Renée had ordered Ripert to oversee several renovation projects at Mazan, to fix the leaking roof and replace several doors that did not close properly. Renée's advisors made the decision that avoiding legal action, as well as keeping Brémond onboard as a source of credit, trumped making timely payments to the workers hired for the Mazan project. The money allotted to pay the workers went to Brémond, to serve as repayment on the *lettres de change* Renée had taken as lines of credit from him. Brémond acknowledged the payment of a sum of 2,400 *livres*. At the same time, Renée expressed regret to Ripert that the workers could not be paid, as that money now went to the Brémond account. Renée told Ripert:

I have received at this moment a letter from the workers at the château that gives me the greatest pain in the world, being that, at this moment, we are far from being in a state to satisfy them and I certainly cannot take on a new expense...M. Brémond's money was in part destined for them. I beg you to tell them that, on my part, I will make the greatest efforts I can to try to give them something someday.<sup>30</sup>

She was most likely genuinely sorry about this, both out of sympathy for the workers and because she had succeeded in accruing more creditors. She wanted a personal message

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<sup>29</sup> La Marquise à M. Ripert, 20 mai 1773, in Laborde, Vol. VII.

<sup>30</sup> La Marquise à M. Ripert, 6 juin 1773, and M. Brémond à M. Ripert, 6 juin 1773, in Laborde, Vol. VII.

from her to go to the workers, even though she did not deliver it herself but asked Ripert to do it for her. However, her use of “someday” did not bode well for repayment to come soon.

While the borrowing from Brémond had been settled, at least temporarily, Renée then had to deal with the workers at Mazan sending her letters, telling of their desperate financial situations, and begging for payment that she simply could not afford. In her situation, paying off one creditor ultimately resulted in becoming a debtor to another party. The logic behind replacing Brémond with the workers, though, was that she might need Brémond’s credit in the future, and his relatively high social standing represented more of a threat than did that of local unskilled and skilled workers brought in to Mazan.

Despite the threats of legal action Brémond sent Renée’s way, he represented a creditor who was willing to work with his debtors to try to find methods to negotiate repayment and to help eliminate future contentious situations. Brémond was willing to pass on repayment to others. For instance, when Brémond’s brother came to him asking for credit, Brémond suggested that Ripert pay what Renée owed him to his brother instead.<sup>31</sup> Brémond also made arrangements with a banker in Avignon, near the Sade estates, to accept payments on the *lettres de change* owed Brémond. The idea was for Ripert to draw up a *lettre de change* for Renée, payable to Ripert. Ripert could then take the *lettre*, stipulating that Renée owed Ripert money, to the banker in Avignon; the banker would give Ripert cash on the spot in exchange for the *lettre de change*. In this case, Ripert and Renée could have access to money immediately, and Renée would

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<sup>31</sup> M. Brémond à M. Ripert, à Malaucène 20 janvier 1774 and 24 janvier 1774, in Laborde, Vol. VII.

eventually owe the banker.<sup>32</sup> While this amounted to endorsement, a practice on which Renée relied but that caused new problems as it solved old ones, it demonstrated Brémond's willingness to work with Ripert and Renée to find alternative ways of repayment other than direct repayment on the payment deadline. Despite Brémond's willingness to compromise, while arrangements were being made and Renée's advisors consulted each other to come up with the best possible outcome, Ripert had to stall Brémond, sometimes by simply refusing to respond. Brémond found this an especially infuriating tactic, telling Ripert that his lack of communication caused him terrible pains and made him angrier than just about anything else.<sup>33</sup>

The important role Brémond played as a willing creditor, despite the low chances of repayment, made him the focus of much of Renée's economic activity. However, Renée borrowed from many other sources and treated them in the same manner as Brémond, except she and her staff were less motivated to treat those creditors as the same priority as they did Brémond. A Monsieur Payen had sent his *compte* to L'abbé de Sade so he could pass it on to Renée. He requested repayment in the amount of 200 *livres* for something that is now illegible in the correspondence, as well as passage from Avignon to Villeneuve. L'abbé told Renée to please settle this account as soon as possible, as Payen offered many services to the Sades and was thus a valuable resource.<sup>34</sup> Two more of Renée's creditors wrote to Ripert in July of 1773 asking for payment: Monsieur Masblanc and Monsieur Laugier, who inquired about the 3,000 *livres* they had loaned to

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<sup>32</sup> M. Brémond à M. Ripert, Roquemaure, ce 16 mars, 1774, in Laborde, Vol. VII.

<sup>33</sup> M. Brémond à M. Ripert, à Malaucène 20 janvier 1774 and 24 janvier 1774, in Laborde, Vol. VII.

<sup>34</sup> L'abbé de Sade à la Marquise, avril 1773, in Laborde. Vol. VII.

Renée.<sup>35</sup> The priority given to repaying Brémond marked him as one of the most important creditors for the Sades. Few creditors realistically expected to be paid back in full and on time by their debtors. However, the fact that Renée and her advisors at least acted like Brémond was a priority demonstrated their respect for him as a creditor and their good-faith attempts at paying him back, even if those attempts rarely panned out. Repaying Brémond was not necessary to ensure future lines of credit from him; simply acting concerned and attempting to find solutions was enough to pacify most creditors.

L'abbé de Sade had promised a Monsieur Lefèvre lodging at Mazan while he undertook a project there. Lefèvre's stay was to begin the next month, in August of 1773. Due to the pressures of her creditors, Renée did not feel she had the funds to pay Lefèvre for his work or pay his food and lodging expenses. Renée told Fage and Ripert that she felt uncomfortable, however, going against the promises of her uncle and herself telling Lefèvre that his services would not be needed. She asked that Fage and Ripert break the news to Lefèvre for her.<sup>36</sup> On top of all of this, Renée still owed money to the Jewish lender Crémieux; she told Ripert she had consulted with Fage on this and they agreed she needed to wait until she had recovered from her payments to Brémond before she could repay Crémieux.<sup>37</sup> Her eventual solution to repaying Crémieux was to have her farmer at La Coste, Monsieur Chauvin, pay back the *letter de change*, even though Ripert is the one named in the original document.<sup>38</sup> Renée borrowed ahead on the payments Chauvin made to the Sades to lease the property he farmed. Chauvin had the money in

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<sup>35</sup> M. Masblanc à M. Ripert, Saumane, le 15 août 1773; and M. Fage à M. Ripert, Apt, ce 18 juillet, 1773, in Laborde, Vol. VII.

<sup>36</sup> M. Fage à M. Ripert, Apt, ce samedi soir, in Laborde, Vol. VII.

<sup>37</sup> La Marquise à M. Ripert, ce 23 septembre 1773, in Laborde. Vol. VII.

<sup>38</sup> La Marquise à M. Ripert, La Coste, fin 1773, in Laborde. Vol. VII.

hand to immediately forward to Renée's creditor, and thus Renée became a debtor to another member of her household staff. In the same letter explaining the new arrangement with Crémieux and Chauvin, Renée noted that two more of her creditors, M. Lions from Arles and a Madame de Vaucluse, "*me menace très sérieusement.*" While she did not specify the amount owed to these two, they apparently persistently sought repayment as well.

In the midst of so much debt to her various creditors, Renée still spent money, money the Sade family did not have, and on items other than those luxuries for Donatien's visits. During the summer of 1773, a house in Provence came up for sale, and many of Donatien's friends suggested that the Sades purchase it. Renée admitted to Ripert that she could not afford the house. At this same time, Mazan was undergoing its necessary renovations, renovations for which Renée could not afford to pay the workers.<sup>39</sup> Fage suggested in a letter to Ripert that Renée must either sell Mazan to purchase this new house or forget about the new house altogether. Fage felt it might be better to sell Mazan rather than add to it through renovation projects.<sup>40</sup> Paulet, Donatien's friend, continued to suggest that Donatien and Renée purchase the house, as it would add to the Sade's already impressive property holdings in the area. Under this pressure, Renée decided to try to finance its purchase through Ripert and keep Mazan, an ancestral Sade property. She could pay for half of the new house, and she requested that Ripert forward her the money without charging for an advance or charging interest.<sup>41</sup> Renée admitted to Ripert to having only 600 *livres* to her name, and the purchase of the

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<sup>39</sup> La Marquise de Sade à Ripert, 6 juin 1773, in Laborde, Vol. VII.

<sup>40</sup> M. Fage à M. Ripert, 26 mai 1773, in Laborde, Vol. VII.

<sup>41</sup> La Marquise de Sade à Ripert, 22 septembre 1773, in Laborde, Vol. VII.

house required that she be forwarded by either Ripert or Fage 1,200 *livres*.<sup>42</sup> In his re-telling of his conversation with Renée regarding the house purchase, Fage wrote to

Ripert:

I am here at La Coste for all of this week. Madame de Sade made me aware of your letter and the two items it contained... The second item in your letter is the house in question; Madame de Sade will willingly agree to its acquisition. The unique obstacle that presents itself is the damned money, as you can well determine at the moment she has nothing but 600 *livres* in her pocket... If, as you attest, it is a very good idea and you are interested, it will be necessary, on your part, to find her at total of 1,200 *livres*...<sup>43</sup>

Fage suggested to Ripert that they find an intermediary—someone who could provide the entire sum immediately and would be willing to allow Renée to slowly pay back the deposit in installments.<sup>44</sup> Clearly, Renée was in no financial position to purchase the house, but social pressure demanded that she do so. The tension between acting like a Sade and warding off financial doom occupied much of her time and attention. In the end, her advisors indulged her, and she plunged deeper into debt with the purchase of a new property.

One contributing factor to Renée's troubled finances was her husband's multiple imprisonments. In the eighteenth century, public tax money did not support prisons and the needs of individual prisoners. For those who wanted a comfortable experience in prison—and Donatien certainly did—the prisoner's family was responsible for providing for the needs of the prisoner. Renée provided Donatien's lodging, food, and creature comforts. An inventory of Donatien's prison cell at Miolans listed, among many other

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<sup>42</sup> M. Fage à M. Ripert, à La Coste, ce 28 septembre, 1773, in Laborde, Vol. VII.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.



items: a bed with curtains surrounding it; a mattress for the bed; a writing desk, fully-supplied; a green table cloth for the writing desk; six geographical maps that adorned the cell walls; all manner of silverware and dishes, teacups and earthenware bowls; silver candlesticks, a mirror, a bidet, and a chamber pot.<sup>45</sup> Donatien's family paid for the food he ate with his silverware and dishes and the ink and paper with which he wrote letters on his desk. The curtained bed that afforded privacy, despite the fact that he had the luxury of inhabiting a private cell, and the six maps that decorated the cell walls were expensive items. For a wealthy person imprisoned in eighteenth-century France, with family support, such a prisoner's quality of life did not diminish during detainment. While the poor and those of lesser means fought over gruel, wore the clothes in which they were arrested until they turned to rags, and lived in large groups, the wealthy could sustain their elite lifestyle while in prison. Aside from the everyday pressures of financing multiple households and estates, and those of a bankrupt family at that, Renée also had to find the funds to support Donatien while he was in prison and on the run.

The demands put upon Renée as the Sade financial manager occasionally took their toll on her. While she usually approached her financial problems and Donatien's legal problems with either a stoic attitude or an air of indifference appropriate to her social standing, she let her frustration and despair show very rarely in her letters to her advisors. When a notary from Carpentras had made plans to visit La Coste to consult with Renée on her financial situation, she told Ripert to tell the notary:

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<sup>45</sup> Etat des Effets laissés à miolans, dressé par le Marquis de Sade, avril 1773, in Laborde, Vol. VII.

the truth is that I am tormented by my creditors, that it is a struggle for me to live because almost all of my revenue is already spent, and I must put and end to this as quickly as possible.<sup>46</sup>

Her frustration was palpable with her use of words like “tormented” and “struggle” when describing her feelings. That she called in yet another notary to help advise her attested to her desire to put an end to her debt cycle as soon as possible. While in reality her financial practices did not change, her momentary despair proves that she at least occasionally recognized that her household finances were untenable in the long term.

As creditors continued to seek payments on their *lettres de change*, Ripert suggested that Renée pawn some of her household items to make the payments. Renée, however, was reluctant to do so because she worried she would not get a fair price and that her financial problems, if she publicly pawned or auctioned her possessions, would become public.<sup>47</sup> Ripert had asked Renée what items she had available to put up for sale or to pawn that would total 1,500 *livres*, and she responded:

I will tell you that I have a silver gilt bowl, a silver coffee pot, and if that is not enough to cover the amount, a sugar bowl or a silver medal...I want this [selling of her items for money] to happen secretly...You can tell that I do not want to part with all of this by pawning it publicly.<sup>48</sup>

The practice of pawning was seen as something undertaken by the lower classes and was particularly associated with the financial practices of lower-class women.<sup>49</sup> For someone of the social standing of the Marquise to pawn her household items in order to amass enough cash to pay her debts would have not only been embarrassing; it would have been

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<sup>46</sup> La Marquise de Sade à Ripert, 12 mai 1774, in Laborde, Vol. VIII.

<sup>47</sup> La Marquise de Sade à Ripert, 18 mai 1774, in Laborde, Vol. VIII.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Beverly Lemire, Ruth Pearson, and Gail Campbell, eds., *Women and Credit: Researching the Past, Refiguring the Future* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2001), p. 12.

viewed as inappropriate to someone of her station. If it were widely known that Renée had resorted to pawning her items, it might damage her reputation in the eyes of current and future creditors. Such a public acknowledgement of insolvency would not inspire confidence in creditors. That Ripert suggested this to her as a method of alleviating her financial strain attested to the dismal state of the Sade's finances. While she initially balked at the idea of selling household items, she eventually acquiesced if it would "happen secretly" so that no one would know that the items were hers or why she was selling them.

By the middle and end of 1774, local creditors finally hired a local prosecutor to uphold and demand payments on the *lettres de change* Renée had used to borrow money. Renée turned to Gaufridy for financial and legal counsel in this matter, sending him letters from the prosecutor and asking if the *lettres de change* were legitimate and needing to be paid.<sup>50</sup> In the meantime, while on a trip to Paris to hear Donatien's trial by the *parlement*, Renée requested from Ripert the "small" sum of 700 *livres*, claiming that was all that was necessary to perfect her finances. She assured Ripert this would be the last time she would ask him for money on credit. Upon her return to Provence, she promised Ripert she would return the 700 *livres* and all of her debts would be liquidated.<sup>51</sup> L'abbé sent Gaufridy a reminder that he should keep Renée focused on finding a solution to her financial problems during her stay in Paris, as keeping up with Donatien's legal situation might prove distracting.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> La Marquise de Sade à Gaufridy, 18 mars 1774 and avril 1774 in the Gaufridy Collection, Spencer Research Library.

<sup>51</sup> La Marquise de Sade à Ripert, 26 septembre 1774, in Laborde, Vol. VIII.

<sup>52</sup> L'abbé de Sade à M. Gaufridy, à Saumane, ce 21 août 1774, in Laborde. Vol. VII.

Renée's trip to Paris ushered in a short-lived period of financial luck for the Sades. While she was in Paris, Renée's mother was able to make some advantageous financial arrangements for her,<sup>53</sup> and in early 1775, one *lettre de change* upon which a creditor was trying to seek payment was determined to be false.<sup>54</sup> Aside from endorsement, Renée relied on her family to help her out of her financial problems. Financial practices such as endorsement represented a temporary solution; Renée's mother, La Présidente, possessed the financial power to make Renée's problems with creditors disappear. The consequence of relying on family was that Renée was forced to stay in sustained contact with her mother. When Renée could not pay the workers at Mazan or her Jewish lender because of her payment to Brémond, she eventually sent those debts along to her mother. La Présidente took responsibility for paying 4,885 *livres* for workers on the house at Mazan, 4,600 *livres* for various *lettres de change* taken out by Renée and L'abbé de Sade, and 7,750 *livres* to Abraham Crémieux, the Jewish lender.<sup>55</sup> It seems as though La Présidente took on these debts for her daughter and son-in-law and paid off these significant sums.

La Présidente did not always unquestioningly pay Renée's debts for her. In an exchange among Renée, Ripert, and Gaufridy, Renée complained about her mother's refusal to accept transfer of a *lettre de change*. Apparently a few weeks later, Gaufridy convinced La Présidente to accept this debt owed to a Monsieur Brun, explaining that Renée could not pay for it herself because she was forced to use her silver as collateral to

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<sup>53</sup> La Marquise de Sade à Gaufridy, aout 1774, in Laborde Vol. VIII.

<sup>54</sup> La Marquise de Sade à Gaufridy, undated, 1775, in the Gaufridy Collection, Spencer Research Library.

<sup>55</sup> Etat des dettes à Mazan tel qu'il a été envoyé à Mme de Montreuil, Mazan, 1773, in Laborde, Vol. VII.

pay debts associated with Donatien's arrest the previous spring. Had her silver been available, she could have used it to pay off her debt to Brun instead. Since Donatien's arrest was La Présidente's doing in the first place, Gaufridy and Renée convinced her that the inability to pay was partially her fault. This logic seemed to work on La Présidente, as Renée and Gaufridy drew up a transfer of the debt to La Présidente.<sup>56</sup> When Renée's mother did not feel generous, Donatien had relatives that could serve as potential lenders, as was the case with a 200 *livre* loan from Madame de Sade de Saint-Laurent, Donatien's aunt, who served as abbess of the convent of Saint-Laurent and could apparently lend at least small amounts in times of need.<sup>57</sup>

In mid to late 1774, Renée decided that changes must occur in the Sade household in order for it to persist. The previous two years of financial wrangling, including using family resources to pay off external debt, represented one way she tried to restructure her life. Her travel to Paris to view Donatien's trial and to try to bring him home a free man was another step in this direction. One more initiative Renée took was to reinvigorate her household staff. Except for her valet, Jean, all of her other servants were either fired or sent to other Sade châteaux to work. On her way back to Provence from Paris, Renée stopped in Lyon to look at some girls who might return with her to La Coste to work permanently.<sup>58</sup> She wanted to spend all winter hiring servants and putting her finances in order, and the only person helping her would be Gaufridy because "*il faut de l'ordre et de l'économie.*"<sup>59</sup> In her attempt to accomplish this, Renée gave Ripert the task of finding a

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<sup>56</sup> La Marquise à M. Ripert, 11 décembre, 1774; and La Marquise à M. Gaufridy, 1er janvier 1775, in Laborde, Vol. VII.

<sup>57</sup> M. Tilloy à M. Ripert, à Saumane, ce 30 novembre 1773, in Laborde, Vol. VII.

<sup>58</sup> La Marquise de Sade à Gaufridy, novembre 1774, in Laborde, Vol. VII.

<sup>59</sup> La Marquise de Sade à Ripert, 26 novembre 1774, in Laborde, Vol. VII.

girl to be in her service who would accept payment other than money.<sup>60</sup> Since the Sade family was short of financial resources, Renée tried to find a staff willing to work for food and lodging rather than direct payment. Despite this attempt, members of the Sade household staff began making accusations that they were neither paid nor provided with food, and that Renée forced them to stay in her employ and would not let anyone leave the premises. Renée, Donatien, their children, and three trusted household employees eventually left for Paris in 1777, abandoning La Coste and leaving the Sade properties to Ripert and Gaufridy.<sup>61</sup>

### **Noblewomen as Lenders**

Wealthy families possessing adequate financial resources served as lenders of credit. When wealthy families operated as lenders, women took control of securing repayment in the absence of their husbands. While Renée borrowed excessively, female heads of households for financially stable families were involved in lending practices. Both the Marquis and Marquise d'Excorailles corresponded with their debtors and negotiated terms of repayment or chided those who did not pay.<sup>62</sup> The Marquise, Anne, wrote several letters to the Marquis de Miromensnil, her father and *premier president* of the *parlement* of Rouen, discussing her financial matters. Miromensnil worked as an intermediary for the Excorailles, much in the same manner as Gaufridy did for the Sades, and he also borrowed money from them, so lending occurred within the family. Anne pointed out that Miromensnil himself owed a large debt to several creditors, one of which

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<sup>60</sup> La Marquise de Sade à Ripert, 1774/1775” in Laborde, Vol. VII.

<sup>61</sup> For a full discussion of this chronology, see Chapter 1.

<sup>62</sup> 512 AP: Fonds Miromensnil, 6, Dossier 1, Archives Privées, Archives Nationales, Paris, France.

was her family. She tried to politely prompt him to pay back his share by claiming she needed the money to meet the financial needs of her children.<sup>63</sup> She had mentioned both immediate needs for the children, such as paying their tutors, and the more long-term security of their inheritance.<sup>64</sup> Several months earlier, Anne had written to Miromensnil, obviously frustrated that the receipts she requested that he send her had not arrived. She was looking to order her finances and determine which of her debtors still had not paid; apparently Miromensnil did not produce the necessary paperwork. She even suggested to him in which files the receipts might be found, if he kept such papers organized in a rational manner.<sup>65</sup>

In her messages to Miromensnil, Ann took a firm, authoritative tone and yet her requests for repayment of debts were distinctly feminine. Her reasons for wanting her father to repay his debts and secure repayments from other debtors were not about duty, honor, or right. Certainly, she and her husband were legally due the money, and paying it back was a matter of honor on the part of those to whom the Excorailles extended credit. Her stated reason for needing to be repaid centered on her family, her children especially. Her need to provide for them while they were still children, as well as securing a viable inheritance for them when they became older, served as her motivating factors for

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<sup>63</sup> Letters from la marquise d'Excorailles to the marquis de Miromensnil, premier president du parlement de Rouen, 10 avril 1760, in 512 AP: Fonds Miromensnil, 6, Dossier 2. Armand Thomas Hue marquis de Miromensnil Correspondence passive. 1758-1795. Lettres de sa fille, Anne Angélique Armande Georgett Hue. Lettres de la marquise d'Excorailles.

<sup>64</sup> Letters from la marquise d'Excorailles to the marquis de Miromensnil, premier president du parlement de Rouen, 15 novembre 1758, in 512 AP: Fonds Miromensnil, 6, Dossier 2. Armand Thomas Hue marquis de Miromensnil Correspondence passive. 1758-1795. Lettres de sa fille, Anne Angélique Armande Georgett Hue. Lettres de la marquise d'Excorailles.

<sup>65</sup> Letters from la marquise d'Excorailles to the marquis de Miromensnil, premier president du parlement de Rouen, 10 decembre 1759, in 512 AP: Fonds Miromensnil, 6, Dossier 2. Armand Thomas Hue marquis de Miromensnil Correspondence passive. 1758-1795. Lettres de sa fille, Anne Angélique Armande Georgett Hue. Lettres de la marquise d'Excorailles.

seeking payment of the debts owed her. Because the children's grandfather received these letters and was responsible for some of the debt, this strategy probably worked especially well on an emotional level.

Women who managed households and estates did not just take care of family issues while their children lived at home; women could play an important part not only in the financial lives of minor children but also those of grown children. The responsibility of women for the financial status of their children extended well into adulthood. In the mid-1770s, the Soubrany family of the Puy-de-Dôme *département* were second generation noble magistrates in Riom, whose patriarch had married into a longer-established line of *noblesse de robe* in Clermont. The son of the elder Soubrany joined the military during this period, and correspondence exists between the son and his mother.<sup>66</sup> As he traveled throughout the country while conducting his military service, the younger Soubrany sent accounts of his expenses back to his mother, and he even noted in one correspondence that “it is shocking how all of the little sums together increase.”<sup>67</sup> Sending back a calculated receipt of his expenses to his mother was a sign that she was the family member responsible for seeing to his financial needs while he traveled with the French army. Whatever he could not afford to pay for himself was purchased with credit and then sent back to his mother so she could see to the payment of his creditors.

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<sup>66</sup>Robert du Corail, *Amable Soubrany de Macholles: Sa Jeunesse D'Après Quelques Lettres et Des Documents Inédits (1752-1789)*. Paris: Librairie Léon Vanier, Éditeur, 1906, in box 3; in Lausanne Family Papers, VAULT case MS 5027; Newberry Library Manuscript and Archival Collections, European Manuscripts Post-1500; Newberry Library, Chicago, IL.

<sup>67</sup> Lausanne Family Papers, VAULT case MS 5027, Lettre de 19 mars 1774, Box 1A; Newberry Library Manuscript and Archival Collections, European Manuscripts Post-1500; Newberry Library, Chicago, IL.



He directly asked his mother to either advance him money or pay off a creditor from whom he would secure a loan if she could not send the money in time. In one letter to her, he explained that he was sure his regiment was about to leave, despite the lack of definite orders. He noted that when the regiment decamps, “that is the moment when one most needs money.” Soubrany requested fifty *louis* from her for his impending departure; if she could not send the money to him before he departed, he would borrow the money from one of his creditors and have her give him the funds when he next arrived in Riom. He indicated, also, that he would be appreciative of a *lettre de change* she secured on his behalf for the money if sending the money itself was not possible.<sup>68</sup> In yet another letter home, Soubrany explained that he owed money to a tailor but did not have any money on hand, and his regiment would be on the move by the time he received adequate funds to pay for the tailor’s work. He requested that his mother pay the tailor in his stead, either with cash on hand or by cashing in a *billet*.<sup>69</sup>

This correspondence indicates the high level of involvement Soubrany’s mother had in his financial life, even after he reached adulthood and was employed in the military. His letters were addressed specifically to her, not to both or either parent. He not only frequently borrowed money from her to pay his own expenses, but he charged her with paying his creditors and securing credit documents on his behalf. Whether or not Madame Soubrany knew her son’s creditors is unclear from the existing

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<sup>68</sup> Robert du Corail, *Amable Soubrany de Macholles: Sa Jeunesse D’Après Quelquest Lettres et Des Documents Inédits (1752-1789)*. Paris: Librairie Léon Vanier, Éditeur, 1906, p. 53-4 in box 3; in Lausanne Family Papers, VAULT case MS 5027; Newberry Library Manuscript and Archival Collections, European Manuscripts Post-1500; Newberry Library, Chicago, IL.

<sup>69</sup> Robert du Corail, *Amable Soubrany de Macholles: Sa Jeunesse D’Après Quelquest Lettres et Des Documents Inédits (1752-1789)*. Paris: Librairie Léon Vanier, Éditeur, 1906, p. 56 in box 3; in Lausanne Family Papers, VAULT case MS 5027; Newberry Library Manuscript and Archival Collections, European Manuscripts Post-1500; Newberry Library, Chicago, IL.

correspondence; however, her son seemed to take for granted that she could identify and make connections with those to whom he owed money. This appeared to be a common task he expected her to do, as there is no indication in his letters that he found this to be an outstanding effort for her to undertake frequently on his behalf.

This chapter has demonstrated that, whether as debtors or creditors, women played prominent roles in the financial world of the eighteenth century. Their roles as household and estate managers placed them in local, regional, and even national credit networks. Whether managing household staff, estate responsibilities, or their children, women's financial work took them well outside the walls of their homes and out into a complicated financial world. Women navigated this world and contributed to the wider economic landscape of France with the assistance of knowledgeable advisors. This chapter has worked to uncover how what was considered to be the circumscribed work of household management actually put women at the center of vast webs of credit and debt.

### **The Consequences of Credit and Debt**

The ubiquity of credit in even daily, domestic transactions inevitably led to the ubiquity of debt. The availability of credit “was a two-edged resource that could provide the critical difference in families’ abilities to make ends meet, but which could also leave them precariously close to household catastrophes if they could not repay debts when called upon to do so.”<sup>70</sup> Renée’s constant harassment by her creditors, her troubled relationship with her mother, her abandonment of La Coste for Paris, and her separation from her husband were all directly related to her and Donatien’s levels of debt. Even

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<sup>70</sup> Hardwick, p. 153.

though credit touched the lives of most people in some way, and creditors expected that not all debtors would reliably pay borrowed amounts in full and on time, Renée's concern about her debt and about the satisfaction of her creditors was partly due to the importance of reputation in personal financial transactions.

There was a distinction between experiencing an "honorable" financial failure and between being bankrupt, dishonest, and unreliable. An honorable debtor was a debtor whose insolvency was reasonable, understandable, and someone who was determined to make it right at the first possible chance. On the other hand, habitual debtors who treated their predicament casually or who squandered borrowed funds were characterized as dishonorable. One's reputation as honorable was important, both in the ability to access more credit and as a reflection of one's general character. In 1707, a Lyonnais bar owner brought a libel suit against several of his customers who, during an argument in the bar, accused the owner of being "a bankrupt." In court, the bar owner testified that he brought the suit because his debt was honorable and would be paid back, once the bar was in operation long enough to recoup the costs incurred to open it. The customers slandered him by suggesting that his financial situation was reckless because of his irresponsibility and lack of ability to keep his word to his creditors. The suit was intended to publicly clear his reputation.<sup>71</sup> No one wanted to be viewed as bankrupt, be it morally or financially. While debt was acceptable to some degree, and creditors expected it, Renée did not want to be characterized as "a bankrupt;" even though she never got out of debt while living at La Coste, her constant fretting about it revealed something important about her character and the reputation of her family.

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<sup>71</sup> Hardwick, p. 128.

Indebtedness did not affect only one's reputation; the concept of imprisoning someone for his or her "lack" of credit, or the inability to pay his or her debts, made the debtor physically responsible for and physically punished for a debt.<sup>72</sup> The concept of debtor's prison turned a person's body and time into something of equal value to a debt owed. Donatien's various stints in debtor's prison, while motivated by political reasons and not purely by his bad finances, exemplified the idea that physical capture could right the wrongs of insolvency or at least adequately punish someone for the inability or unwillingness to pay.

France's implementation and use of imprisonment to deal with those debtors derelict in their repayment obligations was distinct among her European neighbors. It is difficult to determine the number of debtors imprisoned in France as a whole, as no central system for housing and recording debtors across the country existed. However, records for the capital city show that, in 1771, roughly 125 men (at least overwhelmingly men) were serving time in Paris for unpaid debts.<sup>73</sup> In order to get a sense of how this compared to other European capitals, this number can be roughly compared to another capital city, London. During the same period, England and Wales boasted approximately 2,500 debtors (a population comprised of both men and women); about half, or 1,250 of those served sentences in London.<sup>74</sup> While a direct comparison between the two cities is difficult, for London was a larger city than Paris and many of London's prisoners were transfers from local facilities, it can be noted that England incarcerated debtors on a larger scale than did France. For Englishmen and women, a punishment consisting of a

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<sup>72</sup> Finn, p. 38.

<sup>73</sup> Luckett, *Credit and Commercial Society in France*, p. 107.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, p. 107-108.

cold, dank, crowded cell, violent surroundings, disease, malnutrition, and lost wages was a reality for the inability to pay one's outstanding bills. In France, on the other hand, while imprisonment certainly was a possibility, the threat represented by the concept of a debtor's prison served as "a part of the process of continued negotiation and compromise, leading speedily in the great majority of cases to some new friendly agreement."

According to Lockett, in the case of France, "seizure and imprisonment for debt turn out to be the exceptions."<sup>75</sup>

Several factors, traceable to the different legal systems of both countries, account for the disparity in imprisonment between England and France. While England preferred imprisonment, France, by contrast, tended to see more seizures of money, wages, and property than imprisonments. This can be attributed to the fact that a French creditor could more easily obtain a seizure against a debtor than he could a prison sentence.<sup>76</sup> Because France's legal code made seizure an easier avenue, seizing money or real property made more sense from a creditor's point of view, as the debt could be repaid with goods akin to what was owed. In general, then, the idea of imprisonment served as a threat to motivate a debtor to find an amicable solution. If a debtor refused to reveal assets for potential seizure or to take emergency measures to resolve the debt, then imprisonment could be the next step in forcing him to find a way to pay back the money owed. The threat of prison served as a negotiation point for the French. When Brémont threatened legal action against Renée, she probably did not fear actually spending time in prison. Instead, his threats made obvious how seriously he viewed the situation. The fact

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid, p. 100-101.

<sup>76</sup> From Paul Hess Haagen, *Imprisonment for Debt in England and Wales*, doctoral dissertation, Princeton University, 1986, in Ibid, p. 105.

that her husband had actually spent time in prison for debt-related offenses helped drive the point home to Renée that, when a creditor began to mention legal recourse, the rhetoric of repayment had been escalated. At about the time that Mefferey mentioned to Ripert that Brémond was thinking of taking official action, Renée's advisors became much more serious about finding a solution for Brémond's repayment, and Renée granted them free reign to devise a satisfactory resolution to the problem.

Whereas in England a debtor could be imprisoned before the trial and without the creditor producing proof of the debt, in France, a debtor could be incarcerated only after a trial had taken place and a formal charge had been issued. Even after being charged, a debtor could not be locked up until at least four months after the formal charges had been released and the debtor notified of his sentence.<sup>77</sup> It is not difficult to imagine how many people, after hearing of formal charges, spent the intervening four months putting together enough funds to avoid the prison sentence. Avoiding a prison sentence benefited both the debtor and the creditor, as French law required that the creditor pay for the meals of his incarcerated debtor for the entirety of the sentence. Such a law did not exist in England; thus, the imprisonment of one's debtors did not require a financial sacrifice on the part of the complaining party in England.

Physically arresting the debtor was easier in England than in France. French law prohibited authorities from arresting debtors inside their homes, except in cases of special permission.<sup>78</sup> Therefore, someone aware of an impending arrest for debt could remain inside the home and be safe from arrest. Often, one's place of business was located inside the home; therefore, a debtor could continue to work and earn money while under

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid, p. 109.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p. 110.

informal “house arrest” and thus perhaps earn enough to pay back the debt. Creditors rarely complained about this tactic on the part of debtors, as it made the possibility of repayment a reality, as the debtor could still earn money. While English fictional and non-fictional sources portray the difficulties of women imprisoned for debt, the same image does not seem to exist for French women, as the number of French women eligible for incarceration was limited to those who were officially designated heads of business.<sup>79</sup> Imprisonment was a threat that could be effectively leveled against only a very few women in France.

In dealing with financial matters, the French have always exercised extreme discretion and secrecy. A taboo concerning open knowledge of financial matters persists in modern-day France. The public nature of arrest and imprisonment went against French cultural norms, as did any public seizure of wages or property. Making loan default public knowledge eroded the debtor’s reputation, both as a person and as a future borrower of money. Because credit networks were rarely binary agreements, but instead webs that could involve multiple people in multiple locations, reputations other than that of just the debtor were at stake. The concern with reputation became especially important when dealing with nobility, people who constructed their identity based upon concepts such as honor and reputation. All parties involved in credit networks, therefore, had something to gain from informally arbitrating financial disputes, rather than going through a public trial and either seizure or imprisonment. The ability to seem reliable, honorable, and trustworthy, even in the face of debt, held the utmost importance in the

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid, p. 115.

noble classes, especially a rural nobility whose utility and reputation was being debated by a society in flux.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of this issue, please see Chapter One.



**CHAPTER FIVE**  
**An Epistolary Necessity: Noblewomen, Letter-Writing, and Household Management in the Eighteenth Century**

All of the interactions that occurred between noblewomen and their advisors explored in this work have taken place through the medium of written correspondence. Noblewomen may have had face-to-face meetings with certain advisors on a regular or rare basis; however, the majority of their communication took place through letters. This method of interaction was significant, as it affected both the letter writer and the recipient. Women conducted their written correspondence with their advisors unmediated by an outside authority and often with little or no knowledge about how to conduct a proper and feminine epistolary relationship, let alone a professional relationship based on business correspondence.

This chapter begins with a description of the prevailing societal expectations of women as letter writers and how those expectations affected the relationship between female letter writers and male recipients. The next section centers on the manuals and chapbooks on writing letters that were available to women. Women turned to these sources to fill in the gaps left by their educations when it came to writing; however, the utility of such sources was minimal. The final section of the chapter details written relationships with a variety of experts and analyzes Renée's use of letters to communicate with and assert her authority over her advisors. Letters gave women a way of conducting a wide variety of business with a variety of people and a method through which to remind advisors of their authority; but they also induced feelings of anxiety, inferiority, and confusion. A close reading of the rhetoric employed by Renée in her letters reveals how, despite the deficiencies in her education, she made her writing work for her.

## **Women and Writing in the Eighteenth Century**

The seventeenth century began a close association between women and the art of letter writing.<sup>1</sup> While more serious forms of writing had been and remained closely associated with men—non fiction, playwriting, business transactions—women became models for the art of less serious and rigorous forms of writing, such as the novel and epistolary literature, despite the fact that writing was viewed as a masculine endeavor and women, overall, did not possess the same level of literacy as did men. The letter, though, with its spontaneous inception, non-linear structure, and personal content, seemed well-suited to a feminine creator, and in fact, women were considered to be natural letter writers. This distinction is interesting, considering there is nothing “natural” about the act of writing. Women had to learn how to read and write, how to use writing implements, and how to sit at a desk with proper posture. Cultivating penmanship requires extreme manipulation of the body. Writing first involved strenuous training of a

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<sup>1</sup> For secondary sources charting the rise of women writers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see: Caroline Bland and Marie Cross, eds., *Gender and Politics in the Age of Letter-Writing, 1750-2000* (Hampshire, England and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004); Joan DeJean, *Tender Geographies: Women and the Origins of the Novel in France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991); Joan DeJean and Nancy K. Miller, eds., *Displacements: Women, Tradition, Literature in French* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991); Elizabeth Eger, Charlotte Grant, Cliona ó Gallchoir, and Penny Warburton, eds., *Women, Writing, and the Public Sphere, 1700-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Elizabeth C. Goldsmith and Dena Goodman, eds., *Going Public: Women and Publishing in Early Modern France* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995); Elizabeth C. Goldsmith, ed., *Writing the Female Voice: Essays on Epistolary Literature* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989); Dena Goodman, *Becoming A Woman in the Age of Letters* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2009); Sonya Stephens, ed., *A History of Women's Writing in France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Aurora Wolfgang, *Gender and Voice in the French Novel, 1730-1782* (Hampshire, England and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004).

woman's body.<sup>2</sup> In addition, despite the claim that letter-writing came naturally to women, this feminine epistolary style had certain conventions to which a woman must adhere to produce a proper letter. Thus, a female letter writer had to learn the appropriate style, content, and language use to produce a properly "natural" and "feminine" letter.

This period, especially in France, ushered in an age of famous female letter writers. Madame de Sévigné was widely recognized for the personal letters she wrote to her daughter, which were later published and served as a model for personal correspondence.<sup>3</sup> The publication of Sévigné's letters implied that even private, personal correspondence should adhere to accepted formulaic standards. *Salonnières* studied the art of letter writing, and well-known women of eighteenth-century *salons*, such as Françoise de Graffigny, published epistolary novels from the vantage point of a female character. Interestingly, women's dominance of epistolary literature had both positive and negative effects on a woman's autonomy over her own writing. This section

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<sup>2</sup> For an in-depth discussion of the training women received to be letter writers, see Goodman, *Becoming a Woman in the Age of Letters*. In addition to a discussion of the mental and physical training the writing of letters required, Goodman provides a comprehensive discussion of the furniture, tools, and implements created specifically for female letter writing. Consumer demand led to the production of such items as glittery paper, colored inks, and smaller, dainty desks to accommodate the tastes of female buyers and writers. Writing, then, came to involve the use of proper instruments by the well-trained body.

<sup>3</sup> While Sévigné was and remains the most famous example of the feminine epistolary style, not all women appreciated her letter writing because it was so emotional and personal. These were characteristics men associated with women, and when women conformed to this stylistic convention they were, in essence, reinforcing a limiting and unflattering stereotype. For an example of an eighteenth-century woman's criticism of Sévigné's style, see "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu: The Compass of the Senecan Style," in Bruce Redford, *The Converse of the Pen: Acts of Intimacy in the Eighteenth-Century Familiar Letter* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 19-48. In this example, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, an eighteenth-century female letter-writer embraced the notion of emotional control in writing letters over Sévigné's disjointed, personal, and boring accounts of the mundane details of her daily life. However, for most women into the eighteenth century, the overbearing expectation was to conform to a "feminine" epistolary style that matched the familiar and spontaneous style of exemplars like Sévigné.

explores these effects and adds a new element to the study of women's writing that has not yet been represented in secondary literature on this subject. Historians and feminist scholars, while interested in women's writing and in the epistolary genre especially, have largely ignored the reality that, in the cases of household managers for example, writing was a necessary business strategy and form of practical communication. Women who used correspondence as a way of managing businesses did not stop to think about the artistic contribution of their letters. These letters represented a necessity, as household managers used letters to communicate with advisors and creditors. The content of a woman's business letters ranged from orders and lists of supplies to solicitations of advice and specific requests from those close to her. A woman had to reinforce her position in the household through her letters. Women who were not educated to be writers in the same sense that men were either received an education in a specifically feminine form of letter writing or in just basic writing skills. Women corresponding with advisors wrote almost exclusively to men, and in the case of Renée to educated men of a lower social class. Unlike the published examples of Madame de Sévigné, who wrote "private" letters to her daughter, women like Renée who managed households wrote letters to men, letters containing information beyond the "private" sphere of the topics of emotions and family. Little guidance existed for women on the topic of how to compose business letters. The need to write business letters did not correspond with the societal expectations of how and why women wrote.

The letter most associated with a female author was the most personal type of letter—the love letter. The love letter epitomized the emotional nature of a woman's writing and centered on a deeply personal topic. Through a study of eighteenth-century

artistic depictions of women reading and writing, Dena Goodman has demonstrated that these images overwhelmingly portrayed women participating in an intimate, love-letter exchange. An analysis of the way artists rendered a woman's body language, facial expressions, and surroundings while composing or reading letters, makes it clear that the female engaging with a letter was experiencing emotional anguish caused only by the physical distance of a loved one or a lover's callous ending of a relationship.<sup>4</sup> The paintings and drawings Goodman analyzed reflected the expectation that women read and wrote letters in a private setting and did so for emotional reasons. The artistic depictions suggested how a woman should read a letter—engulfed in passion, in a private setting such as her bedroom, and perhaps even partially nude. Such an image of a woman as a letter reader and writer was at odds with the reality of needing to conduct business through the medium of written correspondence.

The association of women with letters naturally led to the acceptance of women as authors of published epistolary works, such as epistolary novels. Or, as in the case with Sévigné, private letters were published for public consumption. In many cases, the publication of a woman's private letters was undertaken before or after her death without her consent. A male recipient or collector of private correspondence could publish a woman's letters without her permission, and the public obsession with reading private epistles created a market for such reading material. Knowing that letters were not guaranteed to be private, but instead could become public and open to the scrutiny of not just the recipient but others as well, women who corresponded regularly in the eighteenth century had to balance the need for clear communication with the social expectations of

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<sup>4</sup> Goodman, *Becoming a Woman*.

women's writing, as their letters could become fodder for public consumption. Male authors began to study feminine epistolary literature and appropriated the style for themselves. Imitations of women's writing by male authors were just as popular as published letters from manuscripts, as evidenced by the well-known epistolary novel *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* written by Pierre Choderlos de Laclos, a male novelist who dabbled in the imitation of female writing.

Women who wrote business letters subverted the socially constructed ideal of a feminine letter. A model woman's letter should, aside from being written in an aesthetically pleasing, cultivated hand, contain personal information, explore intimate relationships, dwell on her emotions, and provide melodramatic entertainment for a wider audience than the letter's recipient. Therefore, women who wrote for other purposes, especially the more "serious" purpose of business transactions, went against this convention and subverted the social expectations of a female writer of letters. While such a feminist stance was not intended by a woman like Renée, whose letters served as a primary vehicle for contact with her advisors, the purpose of her letters to her advisors, and the vast majority of their content, reflected non-compliance with the social expectation of woman as love letter composer.

Contemporary feminist theorists and historians have begun to explore the impact writing had on women, especially in the form of letters. Eighteenth-century French commentators identified what they termed "*l'orthographe des dames*," or a uniquely female way of writing characterized by misspellings. These misspellings resulted from a tendency to spell words phonetically, as women typically did not receive instruction in Latin or the arcane rules of French spelling. The goal of identifying *l'orthographe des*

*dames* was to eliminate female writing quirks and replace them with more standard, masculine forms of writing. In the twentieth century, this concept was turned on its head by the idea of *l'écriture féminine*, or “that which has been erased through the privileging of one [masculine communication norms] over the other [feminine communication styles].”<sup>5</sup> *L'écriture féminine* recognizes fundamental differences in women’s and men’s writing but questions the historical preferences for a masculine style. Scholars and theorists influenced by the recognition of *l'écriture féminine* agree that, because women could not conform to masculine norms in writing, due to a lack of education and experience, and often could not even conform to feminine epistolary expectations for the same reasons, the act of writing and sharing one’s writing brought about feelings of shame and embarrassment.

A study of those women considered to be the most intellectual of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the *salonnières*, reveals that these women deployed inconsistent and incorrect—meaning non-masculine—patterns of spelling and grammar usage.<sup>6</sup> Even a highly educated and socially lauded woman like Mme. de Geoffrin produced letters containing spelling inconsistencies and grammar usages considered to be incorrect for a man to use in his writing. Women like Renée, Goeffrin, and any other female letter writer unwittingly found themselves in the middle of a grand societal debate over French orthography and whether written French should continue as it was or switch to something more phonetically-based. Because most women spelled words phonetically, as proper spelling necessitated education and practice, the proposed phonetic-based system became

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<sup>5</sup> Kelly Oliver, ed., *French Feminism Reader* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000), p. 254.

<sup>6</sup> Dena Goodman, “*L’Orthographe des dames: Gender and Language in the Old Regime*,” in *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 25 No. 2 (Spring 2002), pp. 191-223.

associated with women. Those in the *Académie Française* who favored the traditional, non-phonetic, Latin-based system supported a privileged, masculine norm. While this debate attempted to champion and normalize a feminine writing style, in the end, the traditionalists won out. In the late eighteenth century, a writing manual titled *L'orthographe de dames* aimed to teach elite women proper spelling so they did not embarrass themselves when writing, especially to men.<sup>7</sup>

Explorations of the character of women's writing, like the spelling mistakes detailed in *L'orthographe des dames*, pointed to the larger realization that women's writing possessed distinct "weaknesses" and was judged to be inferior. A background in Latin facilitated an understanding of the quirks of the French language, and memorizing French spelling and accenting came after education and practice. Beyond mere mechanics, like spelling, grammar, and sentence structure, a woman's writing reflected a woman's mental weakness, especially compared to the disciplined and complicated writing of her male counterparts. The emotional character of her letters, a character that came naturally when writing to lovers and family members and that was encouraged by social pressure, betrayed her physical and emotional weaknesses. A woman's writing rendered her vulnerable by exposing her feelings and her shortcomings. Writing left a physical reminder of a woman's vulnerability, one that could be saved, shared with others, and even published. One of the tensions that existed regarding women's writing was that, while it was deemed inferior, it was also lauded and women were encouraged to demonstrate their cultivation by modeling accepted norms of feminine writing. Female writers were mocked and condescended to even as they succeeded at meeting

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 194.



expectations. Women like Renée who wrote copiously but could not conform to the “inferior” rules of female writing existed in an epistolary limbo.

Those who voiced opinions against female writing, coupled with messages such as that from the *L'orthographe des dames* manual, stressed that women should be ashamed of their writing and self-conscious about their inability to write like men. According to historian Dena Goodman, “the letter as body is gendered, and the shameful body is female.”<sup>8</sup> Twentieth-century musings on the history of women’s writing have also associated a woman’s writing with her body; Hélène Cixous characterized women’s writing as bodily, causing women to experience the same secretive and shameful feelings as do their bodies.<sup>9</sup> Because they have been denied the same opportunities to write as men have been given, women have been alienated from themselves, in both spiritual and bodily terms. They have also been forced to expose themselves to men, laying out in written form their inferiority. *L’écriture féminine*, as women’s writing has been deemed “is hard to follow because it is not linear but begins from all sides at once.”<sup>10</sup> Even though this statement was meant as an abstract characterization of women’s writing, for women like Renée, this is also literally true, as women wrote stream of consciousness all over the page and not always in perfect lines straight across the page. The circular, non-linear style of women’s writing served as further evidence that women possessed an inferior writing style and were mentally weaker than men.

Writing is a self-conscious, deliberate act, one that possesses strict customs and rules. A lack of adherence to these rules reveals ignorance and is a source of

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 191.

<sup>9</sup> Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa,” (1976), in Oliver, ed., *French Feminism Reader*.

<sup>10</sup> Oliver, ed., *French Feminism Reader*, p. 256.

embarrassment and shame, especially for a woman who realizes her ignorance and yet can do nothing about it and cannot avoid the task of writing. Renée, with her meager letter writing skills that adhered neither to masculine rules or even feminine epistolary styles, was forced, by circumstance, to conduct most of her business through the written word. The recipients of her letters were overwhelmingly male and educated. While the content of Renée's letters revealed her vulnerability, so did the act of writing the letter itself. She demonstrated her inferior education and writing ability to the recipients of her letters, and her letters constantly reaffirmed her sex to the readers. Her letters could never be treated in a neutral way by her advisors, as their form constantly reaffirmed her femininity. Renée even had problems writing to her better-educated mother, who judged Renée's writing to such a severe degree that Renée relied on Gaufridy to proofread and rewrite letters to her mother or simply write to La Présidente himself. For Renée, a Marquise in an influential family, to write to her advisors meant she showed them her ignorance and feminine vulnerability with each correspondence. She revealed these things to men who technically worked for her and were of inferior social class. This surely complicated the relationship, as she tried to convey authority through what society perceived as the weakness of her writing.

### **Letter-Writing Manuals**

In the eighteenth century, a prospective letter writer unaware of how to construct a proper piece of written correspondence could consult a variety of manuals and handbooks dedicated to the subject of writing letters. Because the contexts and purposes of a letter varied greatly, prescriptive guides for epistolary creation covered letters of

varying structures and purposes. The instructions included in these manuals, as well as the accompanying sample letters, helped to define accepted epistolary conventions. However, the wide applicability of and utility of these guides to both men and women has come under close scrutiny.<sup>11</sup> The nature of the instructions and of the samples given tended to assume a formal, highly aristocratic, and male writer and recipient, thus alienating non-aristocratic letter writers of both sexes and female letter writers of all social classes. Even those manuals whose titles suggested they were aimed specifically at women contained the same or similar information as more general manuals or guidebooks for men. Therefore, to a woman looking for instruction in how to craft acceptable personal and business letters, these manuals would have been of limited assistance.

Historian Roger Chartier has studied a variety of early modern and eighteenth-century writing manuals and produced an exhaustive study of their contents. The comprehensive nature of his survey makes his work an appropriate source on the content and evolution of writing handbooks. The most popular epistolary guides in the eighteenth century were known as “*secrétaires*,” which were updated re-publications of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century guidebooks in mass-produced chapbook form. One of the most popular and enduring of these was *Le Secrétaire à la Mode*, originally published in Amsterdam in the early seventeenth century. However, the book publishers of eighteenth-century Troyes realized the profitability of updated manuals and began to re-

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<sup>11</sup> For example, see Roger Chartier, “Secrétaires for the People? Model Letters of the Ancien Regime: Between Court Literature and Popular Chapbook,” in Roger Chartier, Alain Boureau, and Cécile Dauphin, *Correspondence: Models of Letter-Writing from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 59-111 and Dena Goodman, *Becoming A Woman in the Age of Letters* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2009).

issue *Le Secrétaire à la Mode* throughout the century. The instructional content of this manual, as well as the sample letters included as illustrative examples, serve as a case study for what similar manuals had to say about proper letter writing. The original seventeenth-century edition of the manual was renowned for its instructional section, as it methodically explained how and why one should create letters modeled after the sample letters.<sup>12</sup>

The original edition recognized two major categories of letter: business and complimentary. Regardless of the purpose of the letter, *Le Secrétaire à la Mode* suggested that all written correspondence strive for succinctness and clarity. The instructions went on at length about how to always adhere to the proper notions of propriety, especially when it came to showing respect for the social station of the letter's recipient. For example, respect in a written letter could be demonstrated by the amount of space between certain lines of writing, both on the outside and the inside of the letter. To show proper respect for the recipient on the outside of the letter, where his name/title and address were included, one put as much space as possible between the recipient's title and the first line of his physical location. This space served as a way to mirror the social gap between the esteemed letter recipient and the rest of society, including possibly the letter's author. Inside the letter, one should likewise afford adequate space between the title salutation and the first line of text. To begin the body of the letter on the same line as or close to the greeting "is reserved for those whom one does not wish to

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<sup>12</sup> Chartier, p. 74.

particularly honor.”<sup>13</sup> Other ways of honoring a letter’s recipient included never using his name, always just his title, and not using abbreviations in any part of the letter.

The manner in which one addressed the letter’s recipient needed to be chosen carefully, as did the language the writer used to end the letter. The way one concluded a letter reflected the sender’s respect for the letter’s recipient. *Le Secrétaire à la Mode* listed the various adjectives that could be tacked on to a letter’s basic signature of “your servant.”<sup>14</sup> The listed adjectives could be combined and re-ordered in order to give due respect. Some examples of adjectives from the manual include: humble, obedient, obliged, and devoted. Superlatives, such as very, most, and extremely could also be included. This gave letter writers a mix-and-match list of appropriate sign-offs for their letters. There were instructions on how to construct a formula fitting for people of specific social standing, for instance clergymen or nobles of certain titles, because the number of adjectives and superlatives indicated the amount of respect the letter’s author had for the recipient.

That such detail was included on the subject of honoring one’s recipients serves as evidence that this was an important concern for the manual’s author. While this may have been important information for one who navigated the upper echelons of society, the manual does not give any advice specifically on how to write letters to social equals or even social inferiors. Also, the issue of the gender of the author and recipient was not addressed. Noblewomen writing business letters encountered the issues of how to write to a man, most likely a man of inferior social standing. These practicalities were not

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 76.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 90.

touched upon in this manual, the tone of which suggested it aimed to assist letter writers with experiences at court or with only the highest-ranking in society.

In 1730, a new edition of *Le Secrétaire à la Mode* appeared in chapbook form, a form that suggested a wider intended audience than the original version, which was aimed at aristocrats. However, the publisher of the new edition eliminated the instructional material so that the chapbook consisted of a brief publisher's introduction and then an abridged version of the original's sample letters. Because the first edition dealt with aristocratic and courtly issues, necessarily, the chapbook's examples were the same, just limited in number. The new edition, then, still managed to reflect only courtly epistolary values and privileged male authorship and readership. For example, of the 98 model letters included in the "complimentary letters" section of the chapbook, 94 were written by men for men. All 98 reflected distinctly courtly themes.<sup>15</sup> In effect, the new version did not alter or add to the original content in a way that would engage a wider audience.

Of the sample letters in this manual, the most practical were those examples of writing to arrange a marriage, to take leave of one's family due to travel, or to express condolences following a death. However, men authored and received the vast majority of these letters, so even those that dealt with "business" did not address the concerns of a female manager. The less relevant sample letters served as examples of the civility, intrigues, and romances inherent in court life. Read in succession, the letters acted as a source of entertainment, a way for those who would never see the court to observe and be amused by the actions that took place there. These letters have been characterized as

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 79-83.

“soap operas” or epistolary novels.<sup>16</sup> The wider readership of the chapbooks meant that a wider group of people could “observe” courtly, aristocratic manners and mores. The letters were often interesting and intriguing in and of themselves: for example, letters in *Le Secrétaire à la Mode* bore titles like “Letter from a Friend to a man accused of having two wives” and “Letter from a man to a mistress whom he loves and who is marrying someone else out of self-interest.” While such letters were probably vastly more entertaining than business missives detailing purchases and credit statements, it is difficult to see a wide practical applicability of such examples.

Several volumes contemporary to *Le Secrétaire à la Mode* seemed to be more promising on the surface, but, in reality, delivered few if any improvements over its structure and content. While *Le Nouveau Secrétaire Français* claimed to contain the information necessary to write every kind of letter, including business letters, its instruction and content differed little from *Le Secrétaire à la Mode*. The examples of business letters it contained consisted of thank you notes to accompany sales notices and other financial transactions.<sup>17</sup> The inclusion of the thank you notes at least acknowledged that people wrote business letters; however, it did not instruct on how to write a letter that conducted business but instead on how to write a letter acknowledging politely that business had already been conducted. The promisingly-titled *Secrétaire des Dames*, a title marketed specifically towards female letter writers, which acknowledged women as active consumers of this type of literature, was in reality a cheaper, slimmer version of *Le Secrétaire à la Mode*. It did not contain a single example of a letter written by a

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<sup>16</sup> Goodman, *Becoming a Woman*, p. 25 and Chartier, p. 5.

<sup>17</sup> Chartier, p. 86-87.

woman.<sup>18</sup> Even much later works, like the *Nouveau manuel épistolaire*, published in 1787, did not incorporate more examples aimed at women. Its examples of friendship letters, the genre most associated with female writers, consisted of nineteen samples all written by men.<sup>19</sup>

Aside from manuals that dealt specifically with letter writing, there existed in this period general pedagogical books for women that touched upon the subject of writing letters. For example, *Études convenables aux demoiselles*, published in 1749, devoted a section to the rules and regulations of writing letters. The rules the book gives are, unfortunately, less than specific and helpful. On the topic of letters in general, the author stated that “several ladies have succeeded perfectly in this without any knowledge of the rules of the art.”<sup>20</sup> This merely reinforced the idea of women as natural letter writers without giving any helpful instruction on how to cultivate this natural ability or how to compose a letter if one did not happen to possess this natural talent. When it came to the subject of business letters:

precision and clarity are the essential characteristics of this genre of letters, for which we do not present a model, since every young lady who finds herself involved in commerce will easily find the short and simple method of this sort of correspondence.<sup>21</sup>

Again assuming a woman possessed some kind of natural aptitude for written correspondence, the author did not include specific instructions on or examples of business letters, assuming a woman already engaged in business could simply do it. In contrast to business letters, familiar, friendly letters were characterized by “an effusion,

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 84.

<sup>19</sup> Goodman, *Becoming a Woman*, p. 54.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 145.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.



an outpouring of heartfelt feelings” that should come to a woman “free and easy.”<sup>22</sup> The author did not seem to notice the contradiction in asserting that women naturally wrote in a friendly, effusive style and in the short, curt style most suited to business. Both letter-writing specific handbooks and general pedagogical literature did not offer women helpful information regarding how to properly craft the correspondence that was crucial to the everyday management of their households and estates.

### **Writing to Experts**

As women conducted business with experts from whom they were separated by physical distance, writing became the most convenient mode of communication. Business letters introduced into the relationship between a woman and a male professional issues of intimacy and autonomy. As noted above, women were not trained to write the kinds of letters necessary to convey necessity in a neutral, non-emotional way. The prescribed characteristics of a business letter—short, simple, and succinct—were not the characteristics women were encouraged to cultivate in their writing. A business letter needed to convey a woman’s authority and autonomy, but chances were that she did not possess the ability to portray herself authoritatively through her writing. A survey of the kinds of experts a woman most commonly consulted via letter during this period illustrates the ways in which these relationships were mediated by the written word. In all of the cases discussed below, women cultivated through letters intimate, non-sexual relationships with socially inferior non-relative men.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

The experts to which women most commonly wrote tended to be the kinds of professionals who had access to intimate, private information. The legal and financial information about their female clients that lawyers and notaries possessed has been presented in the preceding chapters. Women also formed correspondence-based relationships with experts like medical doctors and priestly confessors, and their relationships with these men paralleled the relationships with lawyers and notaries. Although the type of personal information differed, the manner in which the relationships were conducted was similar, as all of these experts worked to leverage personal information to their female clients' advantage and were expected to remain discreet.

When a noblewoman sought the expertise of a legal expert, a medical doctor, or a male confessor to assist with a problem, she typically already had formed a solution of her own, and the expert did not represent her only option for assistance. At the point that woman consulted a physician, the doctor served as one of many avenues for gathering information. Women had access to a variety of female family members, midwives, local healers, and less-expensive "quacks" whom they could ask for advice on their physical health. A medical license did not automatically make a doctor more expert than anyone else, and women employed them as but one option among many.<sup>23</sup> This parallels Renée's relationships with her advisors; even though Gaufridy was a family friend and trusted advisor, he did not represent Renée's only option for information. She frequently consulted Fage and Ripert in concert with Gaufridy. Gaufridy also rarely worked alone to assist the Sades; he collaborated with the other Sade advisors to find solutions to Renée's problems. When a woman solicited advice from an expert, she rarely sought

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<sup>23</sup> Barbara Duden, *The Woman Beneath the Skin: A Doctor's Patients in Eighteenth-Century Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), Chapter Three.

such advice without having a solution in mind. For instance, when a woman consulted a medical doctor, she did not necessarily want a cure for a mysterious ailment but instead looked for confirmation of a remedy she was already implementing. Women ordered specific prescriptions from their doctors, and sometimes they never actually met the physician in person. Women sought corroboration of their own ideas about their bodies instead of treating doctors as authorities whose advice should be followed blindly.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, women acknowledged their lack of information in these specialized circumstances. This tension permeated the relationships between noblewomen and various kinds of experts. For instance, Renée often ordered Gaufridy or Ripert to make what the men knew were unwise financial decisions. Her ignorance and lack of experience did not stop her from making decisions and expecting her staff to implement them. Behind the scenes, then, her financial advisors worked together to try to carry out her wishes while mitigating the possible negative side effects of such actions.

Relationships between women and advisors were not one-sided; both parties gained something from the association. In her study of relationships between female penitents and their male confessors in early modern Europe, Jodi Bilinkoff stressed the reciprocal and even equal nature of these interactions.<sup>25</sup> While it is true that male confessors had power over their female penitents, both in the sense of a superior specialized knowledge, the possession of intimate details, and the ability to sanction a woman as a visionary and potential saint, the relationship was not totally uneven. Firstly, “spiritual friendships” were forged between men and women, and writings from priests

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p. 91-95.

<sup>25</sup> Jodi Bilinkoff, *Related Lives: Confessors and their Female Penitents, 1450-175*, (Ithaca & New York: Cornell University Press, 2005).

demonstrated that male friends received as much comfort and companionship from the relationship as did women. Priests went beyond their basic duties for some special female penitents and became “spiritual guides” who maintained regular, rigorous contact with special women.<sup>26</sup> These friendships allowed men and women to interact outside of traditional social boundaries. Many female penitents saw in their confessors “someone who could offer them advice and consolation and defend them against the slanders of others.”<sup>27</sup> Renée’s advisors became important guides to her as well, helping her navigate not only her duties as household manager but her husband’s legal problems and the Sade family’s deteriorating reputation. Certainly, Gaufridy, with this legal knowledge and local influence, tried to mitigate the slanderous comments of others that were directed at Renée’s family. He even regulated Renée’s interactions with her mother, working within the family to make sure Renée’s mother did not overwhelm her.

Male experts received benefits from female clients, especially those of high social standing. A close relationship with an influential or noble woman could gain a priest social clout and financial resources.<sup>28</sup> Associating oneself with someone with social influence was a common tactic of social mobility in a society based on rank. When one could not change one’s rank, one could forge a patron/client relationship with an influential member of society. Experts who worked for financially wealthy clients received monetary benefit for their services. Financial means did not always reflect one’s social influence, however; therefore, even a more modest client possessing a different

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 17.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p. 77.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p. 26-27. Bilinkoff gives the example of the priest Juan Bautista and his penitent Mariana de Jesús. Mariana used both her reputation as a visionary and her contacts with the court in Madrid to assist Juan in his venture to reform his Order. Thus, Mariana received official sanction of her status a holy woman and Juan benefited from Mariana’s social standing and connections.

kind of wealth, such as an entry into high society, benefited a consultant like a priest or lawyer. Even though Gaufridy already had significant social capital within a provincial region, his attachment to the Sade family provided him with a close association to a long-known and respected authority in that area. Despite the tarnished reputation of the Sade family in national eyes, regionally, the Sades remained a symbol of seigneurial authority. Influential and respected Sade family members lived in Provence, including Donatien's uncle the l'abbé de Sade, a man with whom Gaufridy associated as well. Clients like the Sades guaranteed that their household and legal advisors would be consistently employed, giving them a kind of job security not always assured professionals.<sup>29</sup>

Noblewomen and their male advisors communicated extensively through writing. The use of letters as a form of communication served two purposes. Because women and their advisors were not always able to meet consistently in person, letters helped bridge geographical distances. Thus, a trusted advisor did not have to be in close proximity to a client for his advice to be shared and used. Professionals, such as doctors and lawyers, juggled many clients and could not tend to each person's needs in person. Letters bridged these distances and helped keep the appearance of propriety. Instances of writing became so common to the priestly profession that letters written by confessors to those they confessed developed into a distinct literary genre.<sup>30</sup> Even medical doctors rarely saw patients in person during this period, especially those of higher social standing. Most

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<sup>29</sup> Both Bilinkoff's text and advice manuals from the time emphasize that the relationship between women and male experts was not always a productive, happy one. Bilinkoff cites Teresa of Avila's autobiographical accounts of unsupportive and abusive confessors. She sees this phenomenon as a "commonplace" experience of women's religious lives. Likewise, advice like Fenélon's intended to curb the abuses lawyers could enact upon naïve female clients, demonstrates a level of societal concern that not all professionals could be trusted with the best interests of their clients, especially if those clients were women.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 24.

medical practitioners did not feel it necessary to see a body in person in order to diagnose it. Seeing and touching a woman's body, even by a professional trying to treat a physical or mental ailment, was taboo. Most doctors worked from a distance and through modes of correspondence other than direct conversation with clients when they treated patients.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to convenience, writing to an expert served as an expression of one's social class. The ability to write, and to write for oneself (as opposed to dictating a letter to a literate scribe), marked a woman as elite. Noblewomen wrote to their experts themselves despite, in most instances, having a staff of household employees who could deliver the message for her. Literacy set a noblewoman apart from a woman of lesser means when it came to communication with an advisor. This was especially true considering that most professionals did not specialize in clientele of a certain social standing but served people of mixed social rank, like the notary. The same has been noted for medical doctors, where one doctor would see patients from all social classes.<sup>32</sup> The correspondence exchanged between Renée and her advisors marked her as a woman of superior social standing who dealt directly with, and thus insinuated a degree of autonomy and authority over, her domestic duties. Although she often needed advice or services performed, she always dictated what she wanted, whom she wanted to do it, and how she wanted it accomplished. When she left a decision up to Gaufridy or Ripert, she made it explicitly clear that it was her decision to do so because of her confidence in both of their abilities. Any questions she had, she posed because she felt the men had more experience or better resources and could assist her. While these men entered the female

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<sup>31</sup> Duden.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 81-2.

sphere of household management and counseled Renée, they entered her sphere at her invitation and offered their resources and knowledge willingly. Renee was able to function as a household manager and overcome the difficulties of living up to an ideal by consulting counselors of her choice.

### **The Rhetoric of Household Management**

The implementation of letters as the vehicle for communication between household and estate managers and their advisors affected a woman's relationship with the letter's recipient. Firstly, it must be noted that overwhelmingly, advisors to noblewomen were male, as women consulted experts such as lawyers, notaries, and financial managers. Before Donatien married and brought his wife to Provence to manage the Sade estates, Ripert undertook these duties and continued to see to the everyday running of Mazan, even after Renée's move to La Coste. Therefore, Renée communicated to male advisors who were, in terms of social standing, inferior to her position as a noblewoman. Gaufridy was rather financially prosperous, but it was not a given that a notary or lawyer secured much income. By the eighteenth century, there were more lawyers than legal jobs in France. Because notaries did so much business, many lawyers doubled as notaries, even though they were over-qualified for the job. Stringing together notarial duties and whatever work related to legal practice was available became a common way for lawyers to put food on the table.<sup>33</sup> In this case, Renée interacted with a well-to-do provincial magistrate. The Sade family was bankrupt,

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<sup>33</sup> David A. Bell, *Lawyers and Citizens: The Making of A Political Elite in Old Regime France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

whereas professionals like Gaufridy could be of the financial elite in eighteenth-century French society. Financial disparities aside, Renée was titled and her advisors were not.

The vast majority of Renée's interactions with her male advisors took place without the mediating authority of a related male, such as her father or her husband. Donatien spent a significant amount of time away from La Coste, both by choice and by necessity, due to his criminal actions. When Donatien was home, Renée noted that he did not seem interested in involving himself with the minutiae of household and estate matters. Donatien preferred to spend his days writing what he considered to be masterpieces, staging elaborate theatrical productions in his châteaux, and what he described as expressing his individualism through his libertine sexual acts. While the situation with Renée's husband may be extreme and the reasons for his absences unique, the frequency of his absences from home was not uncommon for noblemen of his period. Being a noble required travel to court to garner favors, travel between several estates to check on their status, or travel due to military campaigns.<sup>34</sup> A provincial noblewoman, then, spent much time managing the estate and household without her husband's presence and immediate input. She interacted with and shared private family information with non-relative men without the supervision of a father, brother, husband, or other powerful male relative. L'abbé de Sade offered some assistance, but he remained absent from Renée's regular interactions with Ripert and Gaufridy. Women were able to forge

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<sup>34</sup> For example, the comtesse Le Camus wrote several letters to her husband's friends in order to find a loophole so that he would not have to actually join his military regiment in its travels and encampment away from home. She was met with the response that he must go and serve the king, and thus be away from the household, for an undetermined period of time. From letter dated 20 mai 1757 in 508 AP: Fonds d'Etampes-Valençay-Geoffrin, 28, Dossier 3: La comtesse Le Camus, 1757-1762, Archives Privées, Archives Nationales, Paris, France.



familiar, friendly relationships with these men, relationships based on a written form of communication.

The structure of Renée's letters reflected her basic education and a lack of conformity to the conventions of female epistolary production. She often misspelled words and wrote with little or no grammatical structure. Unlike her husband, who diligently crafted himself to be a writer even in his personal correspondence, Renee's letters did not conform to artistic, literary expectations. Instead, she used plain, simple language and no punctuation. Her letters read like a stream of consciousness communication instead of a deliberate attempt appear literary. Renée's correspondence seemed stream of consciousness even in appearance; she wrote sideways and crossways all over the page, perhaps signaling that she did not plan out her letters before she began to write. This contrasted with the prescribed ideal that women be concerned with the physical presentation of their letters, including the spacing and alignment of the words on the page, which ease in reading and reflect a certain amount of care and sophistication.<sup>35</sup>

She relayed the content of her letters in a chaotic, disorganized way. She, for instance, often began a letter to Ripert with a shopping list, then spoke of house repairs, and ended the letter with more items for her shopping list. Her letters did not have a chronological or thematic organization; they appear to be her thoughts as they came with little preparation and organization. She only occasionally inquired into Ripert's and Gaufridy's personal lives, and she rarely mentioned her emotions or feelings in letter. Her letters did not contain the type of drama that a woman's letter should. In purpose,

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<sup>35</sup> Goodman, *Becoming a Woman*, p. 155.

content, and style, then, Renée's writing did not match the expectations male readers had for female letters.

Renée struggled with her writing, but she employed some simple techniques, such as formal or forceful language, when making demands of her advisors. Through her written word, Renée reinforced her role as household manager, and thus an authority over her advisors and staff. She needed to take on an authoritative tone even though it was clear she relied heavily on her advisors for assistance and often did not possess the knowledge necessary to complete tasks without their consultation. While she was nominally of superior standing to her advisors, in reality, she was, in most situations, practically inferior. Renée resolved this tension by taking an authoritative tone when dealing with the few issues with which she was completely comfortable. After a visit to Mazan, Renée remarked that she had noticed the leaking roof and warped doors, and she granted Ripert permission to see to the repair of these fixtures. Surely Ripert, who took full responsibility for the Mazan chateau and who had managed that property before Renée's arrival in Provence, would have seen to these repairs himself, without Renée's prompting. Therefore, even though her note to Ripert about these issues might have seemed superfluous, it helped to establish Renée as the ultimate authority on Sade household matters and served as a tacit reminder to Ripert that, though she regularly consulted him and gave him a high degree of autonomy, he could not and should not act without her authorization. When asking that something be done, Renée used very formal language—instead of “could you” or “would you,” Renée used “*prier de*,” a very formal way of asking for something, when addressing Ripert. Upon noticing that something needed to be undertaken by her advisors, Renée said with certainty that “*il faut*” which

connotes obvious necessity. Instead of asking Ripert if he could or would see to the repainting of the windows at Mazan, she told him that “It is necessary that [*Il faut*] the windows of the château be repainted.”<sup>36</sup>

In situations where Renée felt her advisors overstepped their bounds or made unwanted assumptions, she wrote to them and let them know of it. Renée’s advisors well knew of her precarious financial situation and were regularly charged with appeasing creditors, forwarding her monetary advances, or both. They even took care of some of her financial problems without her direct consent, and both Ripert and Gaufridy maintained contact with Renée’s mother, with whom they discussed the Sades’ financial status. When Renée requested that Ripert have some silverware delivered from Mazan to her at La Coste, Ripert put together the package and had the shipping of the cargo charged to him. In a letter acknowledging the delivery of the silverware, Renée chided Ripert for automatically absorbing the shipping costs instead of billing her for the amount. She told him she wanted to pay for the shipping herself as a first step in getting things “in order” in her financial life.<sup>37</sup>

It is likely that Ripert charged the shipping of the silverware to himself because two months earlier he had advanced her 1,200 *livres*, as she admitted to being nearly broke. Privy to this information, Ripert knew that even a nominal bill might cause her to have to borrow money or have it advanced by him or Gaufridy anyway, so paying for the shipping at the start simply avoided that inevitable exchange. The amount of the shipping was probably relatively small, however, and Renée thought she could have paid

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<sup>36</sup> La Marquise à M. Ripert, fin 1773, in Alice M. Laborde, *Correspondances du marquis de Sade et de ses proches enrichies de documents, notes et commentaries*, vol. VII. 1773-1776, *la vie quotidienne au château de La Coste* (Geneva: Editions Slatkine, 1994).

<sup>37</sup> La Marquise de Sade à Ripert, undated 1773,” in Laborde, Vol. VII.

it or at least easily have found the money to pay it herself. Even if she had to end up borrowing the money, she at least would have then asked Ripert to help her find the funds. She did not request that he send her the silverware and pay the shipping for her. Through bringing this to Ripert's attention, she reinforced her role as the ultimate authority and Ripert, despite his expertise, acted on her behalf, at her request, and in coordination with her wishes. Stepping outside of these bounds insinuated that Ripert was not seeing her as the manager in this situation, and Renée took advantage of a situation she could have handled to make this known. Because the sum was minor, Renée could realistically make a case for this being a situation she could have taken care of on her own.

Renée could use dramatic language when she wanted an advisor to pay special attention to the content of her letter. When Ripert chose not to secure a 700 *livre letter de change* on Renée's behalf, a choice she felt was inappropriate for him to make, she wrote to him that she "is very shocked [*très étonnée*]" that he "let her down" in this situation. Then, perhaps playing one advisor against the other, she instructed Ripert to ask Gaufridy to take care of money situation instead.<sup>38</sup> This touch of drama helped to reinforce Renée's displeasure at feeling as though Ripert did not listen to her or follow her orders. It was probably difficult for Renée's advisors to know when autonomous action would be acceptable or even welcomed and when it would cause Renée to reprimand them. Dramatic language worked not only for a reprimand but also to get across an important point. For example, Renée characterized the information about Donatien that she shared

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<sup>38</sup> La Marquise à M. Ripert, La Coste, ce 26 novembre 1774, in Laborde Vol. VII.

with her advisors as “*le plus grand secret*,” as if the sensitive nature of the information was not obvious.<sup>39</sup>

Despite the high level of intimacy created by the personal, private, and secret information Renée shared with her advisors, her letters also reflected a sense of distance and formality. She tried her best to adhere to the general rule that business letters be short, succinct, and strictly about business, despite the lack of structure to her letters. While even in business letters she sometimes politely asked about Gaufridy’s children and Ripert’s family, she never mentioned her children in her correspondence to them. She only mentioned the problems she had with her mother and with Donatien because those had business ramifications.

Rarely did genuine personal feelings enter her letters, and when they did, those letters tended to be written to Gaufridy, a close childhood friend of Donatien. For example, when Gaufridy was away on an errand, Renée wrote to him that she “awaits his return to Sauman with much impatience.”<sup>40</sup> After an unusually long period without corresponding with Gaufridy, Renée invited him to La Coste for dinner and told him that their communication was “important to her well-being.”<sup>41</sup> These rare expressions of affection from Renée attest to her feelings of intimacy towards Gaufridy. Her words to Gaufridy also had a double meaning. Her impatience at his return could have been due to her needing him for business reasons, to her missing the guidance and comfort he provided her, or, most likely, both. That she did not recall him to the vicinity or make a

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<sup>39</sup> La Marquise à M. Ripert, La Coste, 12 mai 1774, in Laborde Vol. VII.

<sup>40</sup> La Marquise de Sade à Gaufridy, 25 janvier 1774, in the Gaufridy Collection, Spencer Research Library.

<sup>41</sup> La Marquise de Sade à Gaufridy, 18 juin 1774, in the Gaufridy Collection, Spencer Research Library.

direct demand of him suggested that her impatience was not only practical but perhaps also emotional. Had there been an emergency, she could have requested that he return immediately. Instead, in her letter, she ruminated on how much she noticed his absence. Her communication with Gaufridy ensured her practical, economic well-being, as well as emotional well-being. It was probably difficult for Renée to separate the two, since the ability to take care of her children and keep Donatien out of trouble helped to sustain her sense of emotional contentment.

Following the letter writing conventions explained in sources like the chapbooks discussed above, Renée began her letters to her advisors with either no greeting or with “cher Ripert” or “cher Gaufridy,” using a familiar means of address. While this connoted familiarity, it did not indicate a lack of formality; Renée, as a titled noblewoman, was writing to men of a lower social class, men without titles. Her familiarity reinforced her social standing. She usually did not sign her letters to her advisors. Her letters did not follow a predictable pattern of a greeting, a full discussion of each topic, and then a salutation. They just started, and the content did not conform to a deliberate structure of fully completing a thought or idea before moving on to another one. In this way, her letters seem almost stream of consciousness. This can be attributed both to a combination of her status as elite woman writing to recipients of lower social standing and to a lack of rigorous preparation in the art of writing letters. While a familiar tone and the lack of a superlative “humble servant” signature signaled that letter recipient was not of equal or superior social standing, the lack of deliberate, coherent structure marked Renée’s letters as having been written by someone inexperienced, rushed, or both. Her “natural” way of writing letters did not conform to prevailing societal standards of female

epistolary creation. However, through her written correspondence, Renée communicated her needs to her advisors, asserted her role as household and estate manager of the Sade properties, and formed intimate yet business-oriented relationships with her advisors.

## CONCLUSION

Renée died in 1810 at the age of 68. She had spent the last thirty years of her life renting a room in a Parisian convent, at first because her husband was imprisoned and then because of her legal separation from him. She did not have a household to manage, and her financial responsibilities were limited to mitigating Donatien's negative economic influence on the future of her children. This private, circumscribed existence stood in direct opposition to the preceding years of her residence at La Coste. She led a very public life at La Coste, overseeing her household, interacting with prominent professionals and businessmen, and traveling when necessary. Despite having been unprepared for her responsibilities at La Coste, Renée did manage to keep the Sade family afloat during their time at La Coste, albeit it tenuously in most cases.

One important question Renée's case study elicits is one regarding her success or failure as a household manager. Considering how tenuous indeed the Sade finances and reputation were, it is easy to conclude that Renée bungled her attempts to manage her family's household and finances. A negative judgment, however, stems from a definition of success that Renée, and eighteenth-century noble society at large, probably did not consider. As noted in Chapter One, the bankrupt state of much of the traditional nobility was increasingly commonplace by the eighteenth century. This accounted for intermarriage between the *noblesse d'épée* and the *noblesse de robe* or well-off non-nobles. One of the ways that the traditional nobility set itself apart was through not working for money and yet spending money to sustain an appropriately luxurious lifestyle. The ability to maintain a standard of living worthy of the nobility without compromising the traditional noble value of leisure constituted a certain type of success.



Renée's tenure as La Coste's household and financial manager represented a time when the Sade properties remained intact, the structures were renovated and maintained, Renée's children attended boarding schools, and Donatien never suffered while imprisoned or on the run. Renée, with the assistance of her advisors, managed to make all of this happen, even with a negative balance sheet.

It is important to remember that money did enter the Sade household, through *rentiers* and other Sade property farmers. These *rentes* may not have represented a great deal of money, but they could be counted on as regular income. Renée frequently borrowed forward on the *rentes* due to her, an important strategy that got her out of immediate financial binds. Even though the Sades acquired debt on a constant basis, their income did not remain stagnant. The Montreuil family, and La Présidente in particular, ensured that financial emergencies could be resolved. Renée paid an emotional price for borrowing money from her mother, but La Présidente did not expect to be repaid the loans she extended to her daughter. Relying on extended family for financial security was common practice, especially for women. A woman could easily spend a significant portion of her life without a husband, either unmarried or as a widow. Extended family served as a source of support for women and children, the most financially vulnerable groups in society. The wealth of the Montreuil family was exceptional, but Renée's dependence on her family for supplemental income was not. La Présidente knew of the Comte de Sade's debt and Donatien's reputation for frivolity when she negotiated Renée's marriage contract. She acquiesced to Renée's union with Donatien with the expectation that her financial means would be called upon to help alleviate the Sade family's financial strain.

Chapter Three of this study has detailed the ubiquity of debt in during this period. Most people, for at least some part of their lives, owed money to creditors. In the absence of a centralized system for attaining and repaying credit, French men and women of all strata of society developed personal modes of borrowing and lending money. Renée's participation in this exchange was in line with how most people accessed money during this period. One factor that may have set her apart from others was the one-sided nature of her credit network participation; she did not possess the resources to lend money. However, her mother certainly did, and the monetary benefits La Présidente reaped from investing and lending Montreuil money trickled down to Renée. Thus, she was involved in a lending network, even though she was not at the center of it. However, the sheer number of people who credit networks effected has led historian Julie Hardwick to characterize the credit system as a "constellation of credit" because the relationships involved varying numbers of people who were not necessarily in a direct, binary relationship.<sup>1</sup> Credit operated through webs, not direct lines. In this more indirect way, Renée took part in lending cycles, in addition to her direct involvement with borrowing money.

Renée's actions and the concerns she expressed in her letters suggested that her main goal was to sustain the Sade's lifestyle at La Coste and reclaim the Sade family's reputation to greatest extent possible. Her borrowing fueled the maintenance the Sade properties, the acquisition of new property, and procuring the luxury items Donatien required at La Coste, in prison, or on the lam. In these respects, Renée's style of household and financial management succeeded. She actively concerned herself with

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<sup>1</sup> Julie Hardwick, *Family Business: Litigation and the Political Economy of Daily Life in Early Modern France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

Donatien's reputation in Provence, using Gaufridy's high-ranking contacts to try to mitigate some of the damage Donatien did to himself and the Sade family in general. On the other hand, Renée had trouble paying her household staff, trouble that helped lead to staff complaints and protests. Even though Renée may have failed in paying her staff, she was not the only person to have had this problem, according to the conclusions of Julie Hardwick and Sarah Maza. Because an inability to consistently pay household staff represented a rather common situation, Renée probably did not consider this a financial failure. She did become concerned about what inheritance property would be left for her children, and her legal separation from Donatien was motivated by this concern. Married women operated as custodians of inheritable property, working to ensure that it remained intact to be passed down to subsequent generations. When Renée realized that Donatien would always imperil her children's inheritable property, she took steps to legally financially separate from him.

This study had detailed the amount of assistance Renée needed from her advisors in order to run her household and manage her family's finances. It has explored the prominent role that experts and advisors played in the lives of elite women. Renée was not alone in consulting professionals like Gaufridy and Fage. Her relationship with her advisors did not signify failure to manage her own responsibilities but instead represented a widespread and acceptable method by which women gained the knowledge and assistance they needed, be it in the areas of health, spiritual well-being, the law, or household management. Chapter Five laid out the rhetorical strategies Renée employed to reaffirm her role as the ultimate authority when it came to Sade family and household issues. She was able to make use of the information and resources of her advisors while

not completely relinquishing her autonomy. To the best of her abilities, Renée used her writing as a conduit for both information gathering and establishing an appropriate social hierarchy within the household.

Despite the emotional toll that her way of life took on her, Renée succeeded in perpetuating a lifestyle worthy of the traditional nobility. One question that can never be answered about Renée's case, however, is one of sustainability. Renée, Donatien, and their children departed from La Coste after only about a decade of residence there. Renée did not have to find long-term solutions to her financial troubles. Granted, Renée did not know she would leave La Coste in 1777 when she arrived there initially. However, time did not rigorously test Renée's household and financial management techniques. It is impossible to know if Renée's financial system would have remained productive over a span of twenty or more years. Her personal financial situation became much easier after her residence in Paris and her separation from Donatien. That she and her children supported Donatien in prison even after the separation indicated that combined, Renée and her children had adequate means to do so. The separation represented a strategy Renée employed to ensure her financial stability and, as an extension, Donatien's quality of life.

The system of borrowing in which Renée and other French men and women engaged, and the role that advisors played in facilitating these credit exchanges, ended for good in the decades after Renée left La Coste. The unique role notaries played as financial intermediaries in the eighteenth century stemmed from France's lack of a central banking system, which meant that no formalized institution existed to help lenders and borrowers find each other. With the help of notaries, women participated to a

significant degree in the informal, personal types of credit transactions that existed during this period. However, after the dust of the revolutionary period settled, Napoleon Bonaparte undertook one of his most well-known reforms—the Bank of France. He accomplished what John Law could not, which was the creation of a centralized banking system. Bonaparte endowed the central bank with the sole right to produce paper money, and the amount of paper circulated had to be adequately backed by gold or silver specie. In turn, the Bank of France issued paper forms of credit, in the same way that individuals had in the absence of a centralized structure. The bank’s creation and monopoly on credit eliminated the need for notaries to play mediating roles in financial transactions. Philip Hoffman has detailed this process, outlining the decrease in notarial participation in credit actions after 1800.<sup>2</sup> Notaries greatly assisted women in tapping into credit networks. The decline of the notary, coupled with the Napoleonic Code’s restriction of women’s activities, meant that fewer women possessed the resources to access credit in the nineteenth century than did in the eighteenth.<sup>3</sup>

The perpetual problem with any case study remains the issue of wider applicability. In many ways, Renée’s situation was exceptional. She received an oddly inadequate education, especially compared to her mother and her sister. She married a notoriously criminal man. Finally, she only had to manage her provincial household for a determinate period of time, a period that culminated in the extreme action of legal separation. The blessing of this exceptional situation, though, is the copious amounts of documentation that have survived. The infamy associated with the Sade name has meant

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<sup>2</sup> Philip T. Hoffman, Gilles Postel-Vinay, and Jean-Laurent Rosenthal, *Priceless Markets: The Political Economy of Credit in Paris, 1660-1870* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter Ten.

that sources related to the family have garnered enough public interest to have been saved for posterity. This project relied on sources not from the Marquis himself, but those from Renée, Ripert, Gaufridy, and Fage. It is rare to find such a complete collection of primary sources by and on noblewomen and men like Gaufridy, Fage, and Ripert. As mentioned earlier in this study, notarial archives are rich, but rich in a very circumscribed way. Gaufridy's correspondence with the Sades represents a form of manuscript source not available in a traditional notarial dossier. Renée's business letters demonstrate that the written sources women created were not limited to personal letters or published treatises.

Because a comprehensive study of household and estate management has not been undertaken for noblewomen in France, Renée's case, even if unusual in some ways, serves as an important first step in recovering how women managed noble households and estates. The wealth of information available has allowed for a rather full reconstruction of Renée's experiences in these areas. The groundwork that has been done on Renée provides a starting point that can be used to undertake a larger systematic study of this topic. Such a study would fill in a noticeable gap in the historiographical treatment of French noblewomen in the eighteenth century. The implications of larger study reach beyond the immediate topic of noblewomen to encompass a fuller explanation of credit/debit networks, household construction and maintenance, and the role of professionals and experts during this period.

**APPENDIX**  
**List of Major Personalities**

**Donatien-Alphonse François, Marquis de Sade**: Son of the Comte de Sade, a notorious libertine in elite French society. Donatien was born into the title of Marquis, and after a short-lived military career, he married Renée-Pélagie de Montreuil at the request of his father. This marriage secured an advantageous financial arrangement for the bankrupt Sade family. Donatien is most known for his libertine lifestyle, pornographic publications, and criminal sexual encounters. He spent most of his adult life in and out of prison or mental institutions. Known for being reckless with his finances, he exposed his wife to a financially and legally challenging life.

**Renée-Pélagie de Montreuil, Marquise de Sade**: The eldest of six children of a Parisian magistrate and future the Marquise de Sade through her arranged marriage to Donatien. She grew up in an apartment in the trendy Madeleine neighborhood of Paris and received a basic convent education. At the age of 23, she married the Marquis de Sade and began a life as the household, estate, and financial manager of the Sade properties in Provence, far removed from her Parisian background. During Donatien's frequent absences from their château of La Coste, Renée was left alone to oversee the household and properties she inherited through her marriage. Characterized as simple, plain, quiet, and pious, she was an unlikely match for Donatien but proved to be one of his constant supporters until she requested an official separation in 1790.

**L'abbé Jacques-François Paul Aldonse de Sade**: Donatien's uncle who lived in the Sade château at Saumane. A cleric and religious scholar, L'abbé assumed responsibility for Donatien's education when the boy was around six or seven years of age. Despite his religious vocation, l'abbé was a well-known libertine and friend of the *philosophes*. He remained active in Donatien's life after Donatien married and stationed his family at La Coste. L'abbé interacted with Renée's mother, Renée and Donatien, and Renée's circle of advisors. As was the case with Gaufridy, Renée relied on the l'abbé's experience, intelligence, and important contacts to help her navigate her role as estate manager and to assist with Donatien's troubles.

**Jean-Antoine Fage**: A notary in the city of Apt. He assisted both Donatien and Renée with financial and legal affairs. Fage served as the Sade's financial counselor until 1774, when he was fired for his role in arranging Donatien's arrest after the Marseilles Affair. Coerced by La Présidente to give away the location of Donatien's hiding place at La Coste, Fage betrayed the Marquis to the authorities, which directly led to Donatien's arrest. Up until his termination from the Sade's employment, Fage worked closely with Ripert and Gaufridy to assist René with household finances and Donatien's legal troubles.

**Gaspard-François Xavier Gaufridy**: A notary and *avocat* in the city of Apt. Gaufridy's father had served as a notary and *homme d'affaire* for Donatien's father, the Comte de Sade. Gaufridy became a childhood friend of Donatien's due to their fathers' association, and upon reaching adulthood, Gaufridy was hired to serve the same purpose



for Donatien has his father had for the Comte. While Gaufridy's client list was long, the Sades were his most important and prominent clients. Gaufridy served as counsel and personal friend to Donatien, as well as close advisor to Renée in financial and legal situations.

**François Ripert:** Household manager and caretaker of the Sade château of Mazan.

Ripert has been described as a farmer at Mazan, Fage's agent at Mazan, and the manager of the estate of Mazan. Ripert was responsible for overseeing all aspects of the estate of Mazan, as the Sades spent most of their time at La Coste. Ripert worked in concert with the Sade notaries to help secure and pay off lines of credit. As a capable, experienced, and organized manager of household staff and estate matters, Ripert assisted Renée greatly with her expected duties of staff and household management.

**Marie-Madeleine Masson de Plissay de Montreuil (La Présidente):** Renée's mother and Donatien's future mother-in-law. She was the daughter of a recently ennobled family who married another member of the *noblesse de robe*, Claude-René de Montreuil.

Described as ambitious and authoritarian, she went by the name La Présidente. She proved to be financially shrewd, enriching her family through advantageous business deals and investments. She and her husband both possessed a desire to move definitively into and to be accepted by the Second Estate by creating family ties with the traditional nobility. La Présidente negotiated her daughter's marriage to Donatien with these hopes, despite Donatien's sketchy reputation. She had a tumultuous relationship with her daughter and son-in-law. Often frustrated by Renée's simple nature and lack of

intelligence and wit, La Présidente tried to control Renée's adult life through financial means. While La Présidente initially appreciated Donatien's personality and charm, she became his enemy and, according to Donatien, his tormentor.

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