

IMAGES OF WOMEN MENTORING WOMEN  
IN FRENCH LITERATURE 1650-1750

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## ABSTRACT

ASHLEE S. HEADRICK: Images of Women Mentoring Women in French Literature 1650-1750

(Under the direction of Carol Sherman)

This study considers the representation of ways in which female characters help one another in prose and plays written in France between 1650 and 1750. The concept of mentoring, an idea whose roots in western thought may be traced to ancient Greece, is applied to mother-daughter relationships as well as to friendships in an effort to explore how French literature of this period portrayed women negotiating the obstacles they faced during the Ancien Régime.

Six primary texts were selected for their rich development of female characters' relationships in stories of young women coming of age. Included are novellas *Célinde* (1661) and *Mathilde* (1667) by Madeleine de Scudéry, plays *La double inconstance* (1723) and *La mère confidente* (1735) by Pierre de Marivaux, and Françoise de Graffigny's novel *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* (1747) and her play *Cénie* (1750).

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### Overview

A society's stories reflect what is important. Through the words of tales told, acted, and written, we gain insight into what has inspired, troubled, and amused those separated from us by time and place. Writings from France during the Ancien Régime are no different.

In prose and plays from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France, many stories-- chronicles of romance, displacement, familial conflicts, and journeys-- include a figure who could be overlooked as part of the background but who is absolutely essential. In narratives of young women's coming of age, there is often another woman who is young or old, related or not to the heroine, who helps her. Thanks to her guide, each of these young women finds her way through a difficulty and embarks upon a new stage of life.

#### Choice of texts

There are several works from the period that explore the theme of women advising other women. Probably the most famous are *La Princesse de Clèves* (1678), in which the advice of Madame de Chartres to her daughter influences the young woman long after her mother's death, and the letters of Madame de Sévigné to her daughter.<sup>1</sup> The dynamics

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<sup>1</sup> The letters to her daughter began in 1671 following Madame de Grignan's marriage and departure from Paris to Provence and continued until Madame de Sévigné's death in 1694. The first publication of her writing was in 1697, her correspondence with her cousin Bussy-Rabutin. The first edition of her letters including those to her daughter appeared in 1727 (Raffalli 34).



between those mothers and their daughters are not explored in detail here. We do not see in Lafayette's novel or Sévigné's letters the give-and-take in relationships over time that determined the selection of these primary texts. The influence of Madame de Chartres upon her daughter is powerful and lasting but one-dimensional. She marries her to an appropriate husband with little input from the young woman, threatens her with the possibility of troubling her mother's peace in the afterlife, turns away, and dies. We never see her vulnerability or lack of power--a thread that is important in each of the primary texts in this study--nor do we witness negotiation between mother and daughter that shows both of their perspectives. Madame de Sévigné gives her daughter a tremendous amount of advice and affection, but it is difficult to compare her letters with texts contemporary to hers for two reasons. First, her correspondence with her daughter was not intended to be read as fiction. While she was certainly conscious of writing and reading for an audience,<sup>2</sup> the main characters--she and her daughter--were real people, and it seems inconsistent to compare them to texts in which the author and protagonist are separate. Both *La Princesse de Clèves* and Sévigné's letters essentially give the mother's voice with no reply from the daughter. Lafayette wrote her novel in that manner, and Sévigné's granddaughter destroyed the letters from her mother (Sévigné's daughter), so that the younger woman's responses are lost to us.

In the eighteenth century, we again witness a woman giving advice to younger women in the essays of Madame de Lambert (1724) and later, in the corrosive influence of the marquise de Merteuil upon Cécile Volanges in *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (1782).

Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1762) portrays a close friendship between two young

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<sup>2</sup> The public production and receiving of letters is the aspect of the correspondence emphasized by Michèle Longino in *Performing Motherhood*.

women, and Marivaux's novel *La Vie de Marianne* (1731-1741) depicts a heroine's coming-of-age.

The works that comprise this study are those that I find best underscore the importance and the evolution of female mentoring in French society during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Each relationship involves a woman who is more experienced than another offering guidance and/or support that allows the less experienced woman successfully to make the transition to adulthood. The guides include mothers who help their daughters, friends who assist friends, and unexpected allies who aid those who cross their paths. There is also great variation of style in mentoring. Some mentors, including mothers, are very open with their protégées, treating them much like equals as they guide them. Others are secretive and essentially manipulate the young women to make the choices that finally bring a satisfactory dénouement. Some have power over the fate of their protégées--real or invented--while others can only offer counsel that the young woman is as free to reject as to accept. Even those who do hold power in the relationship, however, are vulnerable in one fundamental respect. They are women, and therefore, even if they have money or are the decision-makers in their households, they hold a permanently inferior status in society, and they know that their young charges will also. There is a limit to each mentor's power to change her protégée's situation. She is a guide and companion along the journey, but she cannot remove its obstacles.

What distinguishes the dynamics discussed here from others is that these relationships have an instrumental function in the plots of their stories. Friends and servants surpass the role of the *confidente* who merely listens and poses questions in order that the heroine might speak. Mothers engage in reciprocal relationships with their daughters rather than acting

only as authority figures or adversaries to young love. In each text, the fate of the rapport between mentor and protégée becomes an object of concern to the reader; we care about what happens to their relationship for its own sake. In four of the six works, the final tableau of the heroine's happy ending includes the mentor. This is an important difference from, for example, *La Princesse de Clèves*, in which the mother's influence can be distilled to her words of advice. In the texts explored here, each mentor's importance is much greater than the sum of her actions.

The works we shall explore are the first two novellas of seventeenth-century author and salon-hostess Madeleine de Scudéry, *Célinte* (1661) and *Mathilde* (1667), eighteenth-century playwright Marivaux's comedy *La double inconstance* (1724) and the more serious piece *La mère confidente* (1735), and finally the best-selling epistolary novel *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* (1747) and play *Cénie* (1750) by eighteenth-century author Françoise de Graffigny. Pairs of works by three authors are included so that a given writer's preoccupations and tendencies might emerge and therefore lessen the likelihood of attributing to French society or French literature in general a phenomenon that is a characteristic of the writer. Each narrative centers upon a young woman on the brink of entering adulthood whose future has not yet been determined. We witness each young woman leave her childhood home and enter a new one. All but one of them marry. While the theme of un *mariage-à-faire* drives all of the plots, each story evokes a different aspect of what it meant to be young and female in the France of the Ancien Régime, and every heroine finds her way to safety thanks to the intervention of her mentor(s). These are the aspects of the stories that we shall explore.

## The Period

The period in which these works were published is 1650-1750. The first date indicates the Fronde (1648-1651), the unsuccessful civil uprisings that constituted the last real challenge to the French monarchy before the revolution. Clearly that date also separates the first and second halves of the seventeenth century, a moment which many have observed as marking an important transition in French history, perhaps the definitive shift toward modernity. Phillipe Ariès notes, for example, that the first half of the seventeenth century, like the previous century, was a time when client networks and individual loyalties kept the relative peace and protected the country, clearly a remnant of the medieval era. It was only in the second half of the century, after the Fronde, that the state began to fulfill its promises and in fact to finance the government and its needs. The relevance for women of the centralization of power that defined the second half of the seventeenth century (*Histoire de la vie privée* 17-18) is that, both in government and in their private homes, women's status decreased after the failure of the Fronde and under the reign of Louis XIV, as will be discussed further in Chapter 2. 1650 announces a period of inflexible and focalized power--a very specifically patriarchal power--that undermined women's status in both public and private spheres.

1750 of course divides the eighteenth century in two and is also the year in which Diderot and d'Alembert published the first volume of the *Encyclopédie*. The multi-volume work, published over a twenty-year period, challenged the hierarchical systems that previously had guarded knowledge. It provided the entire reading public with access to information on the sciences, arts, humanities, as well as various trades. It was inherently revolutionary and thus subversive because it also undermined other kinds of hierarchies and

restriction. The publication of the *Encyclopédie* may thus be considered a key event in the Enlightenment and precursor to the revolution.

During the century from 1650 to 1750 France thus evolves from a newly-emerged modern state in which power is concentrated as never before to a society in which subversive ideas begin to appear but before the march toward the revolution seems inevitable. Women were particularly vulnerable throughout the period, for reasons that changed with the shifting social fabric. Their status remained unquestionably inferior, and the resulting importance of cooperation among women is depicted in literature throughout the period.

### Related Studies

This study uses *mentoring* as a prism through which to read relationships between female characters in the primary texts. It has been enriched by works of social, cultural, and literary history, by Homer's epic the *Odyssey* and the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter*, and by studies thereon. In addition to work on the primary texts and their authors, scholarship on the related topics of female friendship and relationships between mothers and daughters, as represented in French literature of the period, have provided context. The amount of prior scholarship devoted to each of the primary texts varies greatly. Only a handful of articles have addressed Scudéry's novellas. I have drawn largely therefore from studies devoted to other aspects of her life and work. Suzanna Toczyski's "Performing Secrets in Madeleine de Scudéry's 'Célinte'" offers some commentary on the main characters of the novella, while Margarida Madureira's "La Représentation de la fiction dans le prologue de 'Célinte'" focuses on the prologue. The scant work done on "Mathilde" seems to deal with Scudéry's representation of the historical Petrarch. Delphine Denis and Ann-Elisabeth Spica published

an extremely rich collection of papers in *Madeleine de Scudéry: une femme de lettres au XVIIe siècle : actes du Colloque international de Paris, 28-30 juin 2001*; the essays offer many insights on a variety of aspects of the author and her writing, although none focuses on her early novellas.

Part of the French literary canon for generations, Marivaux is the author in this study whose work has received the most attention. Studies focusing on his female characters such as H. T. Mason's essay "Women in Marivaux: Journalist to Dramatist" and Elena Russo's article "Marivaux et l'éthique féminine de la sociabilité," have been helpful. James Munro's "Richardson, Marivaux, and the French Romance Tradition" is interesting in that it discusses more than one of these three authors at once. Munro sees Marivaux as part of a literary tradition based in fairy tales, with settings and characters not firmly rooted in an easily-identifiable reality, and he sees Scudéry as one of the seventeenth-century authors upon whose tradition Marivaux builds. Much has been written about *La double inconstance*. Where scholarship focuses on Flaminia, the degree of control she exercises stands out as a topic. For example, Janet Whatley's "*La double inconstance*: Marivaux and the Comedy of Manipulation" and Jean Rousset's "Une Dramaturge dans la comédie: la Flaminia de *La double inconstance*" both focus on her dominance. These studies highlight her influence but do not explore the dynamic between her and Sylvia or consider what her role might suggest about the play's social context. Han Verhoeff's study *Marivaux, ou, le dialogue avec la femme: une psycholecture de ses comedies et de ses journaux* has been an invaluable resource. His feminist reading of both of the characters I read as mentors has been important, though he does not use the word *mentor* or *mentoring*, nor does he discuss Marivaux's plays

as part of a phenomenon of the portrayal of female characters and their relationships in French literature.

Graffigny, long-neglected by the academic world, began to receive scholarly attention in the early 1980s for *Lettres d'une Péruvienne*. English Showalter was one of the first to draw attention once again to this author, as have Vera Grayson, Carol Sherman, Thomas Kavanagh, and others. Also, while in *Women's Friendships in Literature* Janet Todd dismisses Zilia and Céline's friendship as one that disappoints Zilia (311-312), Sherman notes the constancy of the relationship in her article "'C'est l'insuffisance de notre être qui fait naître l'amitié': Women's Friendships in the Enlightenment."

Graffigny's play *Cénie* has received far less attention. Perry Gethner provides a very helpful introduction to the author and to the play in the anthology he prepared, *Femmes dramaturges en France (1650-1750): pièces choisies*. Sherman includes a detailed treatment of the play and of the relationship between the heroine and Orphise in *The Family Crucible in Eighteenth-Century Literature* (Ashgate, 2005), (Chapter two, "Mothers and Daughters: the *Fort-Da* of Kinship," 51-66.) She discusses the relationship between the two women as part of the lost-and-found (*fort-da*) *topos* that she identifies as a prominent theme in the emerging genre of bourgeois drama. Althea Arguelles's dissertation "Re-membering French Women Playwrights in Eighteenth-century Theater" also provides valuable insight into the mother-daughter relationship in that play. Some of the other rare work on the play includes Chloe Hogg's article "The Philosopher as Tramp and Female in the Writings of Graffigny," which discusses women's economic fragility in both *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* and *Cénie*.

The phenomenon of mothers in literature, and in particular the subset of mothers and daughters, is one that has been such a popular topic of study in recent decades that it would

not be practical to attempt a comprehensive review of it. A variety of works on motherhood have been useful, especially those that address motherhood as it was understood in French society in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Social histories such as Phillipe Ariès's *Histoire de la vie privée* have been helpful in placing familial dynamics in context.

Much work on seventeenth-century French literature has examined particular mothers, notably Madame de Chartres of *La Princesse de Clèves* and Madame de Sevigné. Roger Duchêne and, more recently, Michèle Longino, have made fundamental contributions to Sevigné studies, and thus, to the broader area of motherhood in seventeenth-century French literature. An enormous amount of work has been done on *La Princesse de Clèves*, and on the mother-daughter relationship in particular. In fact, the question of whether Madame de Chartres was basically a good or bad mother in advising her daughter to stay away from the Duc de Nemours, whatever the cost, is the hotly-debated question among contemporary feminists studying this period. This study of Scudéry's mother/daughter pair in "Mathilde" is enriched by what scholars have seen in Lafayette's novel and Sévigné's letters.

As Frédérick Gerson notes in the introduction to his study *L'amitié au XVIIIe siècle*, friendship seems to have lost the privileged position in Western culture that it held for ancient Greeks. The study of friendship has nevertheless seen a certain resurgence in recent years, including some work devoted in particular to women's friendships. In 1999, the annual collection of essays published by *Women in French Studies* was entirely comprised of studies of women's friendships. Again, just as work done on mothers and daughters is helpful yet different in focus from this study, explorations of friendship alone provide important insights.



Literature on *mentoring* ranges across many disciplines and approaches. It ranges from discussion of best practices in teacher-education, to networking in the business world, or to programs for disadvantaged young people. One work discusses the phenomenon in the context of non-classical literature: “Mentoring in Four Nineteenth-Century Women Poets” examines relationships among female British writers of the nineteenth century. Scholarly research explicitly addressing the topic among characters in literature seems to draw uniquely from the classical period that gave us the concept. For example, Susan Wiltshire’s *Athena’s Disguises*, discusses mentoring in the *Odyssey*, and Tamara Agha-Jaffar’s *Demeter and Persephone*, analyzes it in the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter*. While both authors’ notes indicate that other sources may provide further insight on the subject in those two classical sources, neither of them makes mention of literary studies that look at it in literature of other periods.

### Structure of Study

Drawing on these varied sources, I read these works of Scudéry, Marivaux, and Graffigny through the ancient Greek tales and other modern understandings of mentoring, as represented in France during the Ancien Régime. The study begins with an overview of the historical context in which the works were written, followed by an exploration of the evolving concept of *mentoring*, and then continues with discussions of the primary texts, paired by author and in chronological order.

## Chapter 2: An Overview of Women's Lives in Ancien Régime France

Le rapport de la littérature et de la société n'est pas celui de deux êtres homogènes façonnés à la ressemblance l'un de l'autre. La loi de la diversité et de la contradiction domine chacune d'elles et c'est de ce point de vue qu'on aperçoit le mieux leur dépendance réciproque.

-Paul Bénichou, cited by Danielle Haase-Dubosc, *Ravie et enlevée*, 40.

### Importance of Historical Context in this Literary Study

This study of representations of women mentoring women in French literature during the Ancien Régime must be firmly rooted in its historical context in order to be meaningful. The prose and plays examined here are lenses through which we may view French society at this period because those works are artifacts of the time and place from which they come. This study focuses upon how interactions among women were represented in this specific context. Literature may be intended by its author to portray people realistically, to convey what relationships might be like in an ideal world, or to satirize. It is inevitable, however, that the literature is created with the author's times as context and reference point; literature never comes from a void.

For these reasons, before discussing the texts, let us consider the circumstances that affected women in France during the Ancien Régime. Their societal position and adult identity were inextricably linked to marriage. Therefore, this overview will include factors related to marriage and family.

### Experiences of *les femmes*, not *la Femme*

The task of exploring factors affecting women during the Ancien Régime in France is complicated by a number of variations in law and customs. First, as Danielle Haase-Dubosc underscores in “Les Femmes, le droit, et le jurisprudence dans la première moitié du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle,” there tended to be tremendous differences between the written law and the manner in which it was actually applied. Thus, as she proposes, one who studied only the law of the period could reach dramatically erroneous conclusions regarding the freedoms and possibilities enjoyed by women. This was true because judges were accorded a very wide margin of discretion (51-52). Local custom played a far greater role than it has in republican France, in which nationwide laws limit the extent to which regional differences influence the legal system.

Not only was there variation in the manner in which laws were implemented, but there was a difference in the extent to which different parts of France had historically relied on written law at all. Dominique Godineau specifies that the region south of a La Rochelle-to-Geneva line was governed by written law, a holdover of Roman law. The region north of that line, on the other hand, was ruled by numerous local laws of custom: “...au nord de cette ligne, on ne dénombre pas moins de soixante-cinq coutumes provinciales et deux à trois cents petites coutumes locales” (18). These customary laws had been oral during the Middle Ages and generally written down only in the fifteenth century. In addition, Godineau notes the added layers of complexity:

[Il existe des] ...enclaves de droit écrit en pays coutumiers ou coutumes particulières dans le Midi, droit différent pour les nobles... la législation royale qui prend de plus en plus de place, la jurisprudence des tribunaux ou la pratique des actes notariés. (18)

Along with the variations among regions and the wide latitude enjoyed by judges, differences in women’s legal status arose from class. When Marivaux’s heroine Angélique

of *La mère confidente* laments to her *suivante* the hazards of being too rich, many readers may scoff, as does the servant girl, at such a complaint. It bears noting, however, that, as Godineau underscores, “Moins il y a de biens et plus la liberté de choix des filles est grande” (31), and the converse is certainly true--daughters of wealthier families had fewer options. Every family, as Haase-Dubosc reminds us, sought social or financial gain for the family through marriage (“Les Femmes” 52). Also, the phenomenon of limited choices for female aristocrats was compounded by the fact that the wife took on the title of her new husband. Thus, if a bourgeois family could amass a substantial dowry, it could potentially elevate its daughter into the nobility, for the groom did not lose his title in marrying down the social ladder. On the other hand, a noble’s daughter who married beneath her rank lost that status through marriage (Godineau 29). Anne Thérèse de Lambert quotes the woman whom she knew in the convent and who served her as a mentor as succinctly addressing this issue in “Conseils importants d’une amie”: “La femme étant faite pour jouir de l’état de son mari, il est certain qu’elle s’avilit plus en épousant un homme au-dessous d’elle, qu’un homme en épousant une fille qui lui est inférieure...(212).”

Finally, age and marital status affected the manner in which different women were treated under the law. At the age of twenty-five, a woman was a legal adult, meaning that after this age she could marry without parental consent;<sup>3</sup> this was the age of legal majority for women throughout the period and throughout France. (It was thirty for men.) Married women generally had fewer legal rights but greater social status than those not yet married and than widows. Widows had the greatest degree of independence and significant protection of their financial well-being under the law, but, as Michèle Longino notes in

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<sup>3</sup> Haase-Dubosc addresses this issue in “Les Femmes.”

*Performing Motherhood*, widows tended to find themselves on the social periphery of their communities.

### A Common Thread: Unequal Status

The existence of these differences does not change the fact that certain generalized statements may be made. This study focuses on representations of women mentoring other women because there is a specificity in women's experiences, despite the important variations created by differences of date, region, class, age, and marital status. This specificity lies in the systematic unequal status of women compared to men. Haase-Dubosc underscores the centrality of that inequality, an assumption at the very heart of the society:

Dans une société où la différence des sexes est au fondement de toute structuration sociale et où la subordination des femmes en est le résultat, l'inégalité des sexes est donnée comme allant de soi, comme étant naturelle.... (*Ravie et enlevée* 16)

A twenty-first-century reader might suppose that women's status in France progressed continually from the Middle Ages forward, but Pierre Petot writes of a decline in women's status in marriage in his essay, "La Famille en France sous l'Ancien Régime": "Dès le XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle, on assiste à une dégradation progressive et lente de la situation de la femme dans le ménage" (13). The gradual erosion was accompanied by increasing emphasis from the church on being a good wife and mother, slowly but surely replacing chastity, which had been the model for Christians throughout the Middle Ages.<sup>4</sup>

Godineau also attests to a gradual loss of feminine prestige during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in France; for example, until the beginning of the seventeenth

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<sup>4</sup> Consider, for example, *La Vie de St. Alexis*, one of the most enduring and popular saint's lives of the Middle Ages, in which the saint, unwilling to jeopardize his or his bride's salvation by consummating the marriage, leaves her on their wedding night in the care of his parents, and goes to beg anonymously in the streets. The story was read in church year after year on the feast day of the saint, giving the people a supreme example of Christian devotion.

century, the queen could attend the king's council.<sup>5</sup> This change certainly did not affect regular French women on a daily basis; probably very few of them were even aware of it. The presence of an active and engaged queen, however, had proved influential in the sixteenth century to women who were educated and aware of happenings at court. Mary McKinley writes of the importance of Marguerite de Navarre to women such as Marie Dentièrre, an enthusiastic Protestant convert who wished to assert her right to teach the new religion and wrote to the queen asking for support in that endeavor. Dentièrre's letter, "Epistre tres utile faicte et composée par une femme Chrestienne de Tornay, Envoyée à la Royne de Navarre seur du Roy de France, Contre les Turcz, Iuifz, Faulx chrestiens, Anabaptistes, et Lutheriens," reveals that the queen is serving as a source of inspiration both on a literary level--Dentièrre invokes the queen's own writings as models--and in terms of the vision that she has for what women might accomplish. She writes,

Tout ainsi, ma tres honorée Dame, que les vrayz amateurs de verité desirent sçavoir & entendre comment ilz doibvent vivre è ce temps si dangereux: aussi nous femmes, debvons fuyr & eviter toutes erreurs, heresies, & faulses doctrines: [...] comme desia assez par vos escriptz est demonstré.... (Dentièrre cited by McKinley 30)<sup>6</sup>

Certainly not all women in France were able to write or might have dared to write to the queen. To the extent, however, that the queen's support and encouragement helped women like Dentièrre be more active teachers in their churches, a culture of women in leadership positions was fostered that could indeed touch women at all levels of society. This example of real-life mentoring, with an educated queen serving as a role model for other women,

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<sup>5</sup> As France's *loi salique* prevented women from inheriting the throne, in contrast to other European countries, the privilege to merely be present at Council meetings, which they lost in the seventeenth century, was, along with the ability to serve as regent during the absence of a husband or the minority of a son, one of the few ways in which women could exert power in national government. (Godineau 82-84)

<sup>6</sup> The spelling and use of accents (and their absence) in the quotation and in the letter's title match McKinley's usage.

illustrates what the society as a whole lacked when its queens ceased to have meaningful roles in government.

It was universally true that marriages were contracted with the interest of family generally taking preeminence over that of the individual. When a father was living, it was he whose decision outweighed a mother's in all matters, including the approval of their offspring's marital choices. A married woman was subject to her husband in law and in practice, took his rank, and was presumed not to have an occupation or aspirations separate from his. As many cultural historians of the period have emphasized, it was certainly not the case that most women did not work. Indeed, it was only the women of the aristocracy, whose educations were much-lamented by writers such as Graffigny and de Lambert, who generally did not work. Nicole Castan observes, "...il n'est point d'usage... de reconnaître leur participation, si fréquente, dans la production pour mieux leur faire louange et reconnaissance de leur dévouement dans son testament" (417).<sup>7</sup> If punishments for a husband's adultery existed at all, they were minute compared to those suffered by a cheating wife. While a man's movements were as free as his energies and ability to find a night's lodging might allow, a woman risked her safety and her reputation by traveling without a proper male protector (a husband, a relative, or a properly-appointed servant).

Godineau provides some context for how the concept of women's unequal status compared to men became particularly entrenched in French society in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. While of course the inequality of women is a theme that can be found in writing as early as that from Antiquity, the rise of the modern state gave wives' and children's obedience to husbands and fathers political stakes that it had not had previously.

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<sup>7</sup> Castan's essay "Le public et le particulier" appears in Volume III of *Histoire de la vie privée*, edited by Roger Chartier, Phillipe Ariès, and Georges Duby.

As France's kings sought to stabilize, increase, and centralize the country's power, the idea that every man, woman, and child in France ultimately owed allegiance to the crown was pivotal to the successful establishment of the centralized state. The family was seen as a microcosm of the hierarchy found in the relationship between the king and his subjects. A wife who questioned her husband's authority undermined not only his authority, but, by extension, that of the king. "...[L]'obéissance de l'épouse ne garantit pas seulement la paix des ménages, elle est nécessaire au bon fonctionnement du monde" (17). Manifestations of women's unequal status appeared in laws and edicts, but perhaps more powerfully in writings, and above all in realities such as the availability to each sex of education, societal attitudes, physical dangers, and economic necessity.

In the remainder of this chapter, we shall briefly consider the various factors that affected women's lives in France at this time. First, a general picture of French private life will illuminate how families and society were structured and how various factors affected women in particular. Second, laws and edicts governing women's status, practices and attitudes that often had a greater impact on women's lives than did the law, and practical and economic factors will illustrate what was and was not possible for women.

### 1650-1750: Period of Concentrated Power and Great Change

Perhaps the first fact to underscore regarding men and women of Ancien Régime France is that they were ultimately defined by their *état*, their civil status in society, and therefore, in life. Although social mobility occurred, it was rare, and when it happened, an individual who had moved up or down the social ladder was seldom allowed to forget it. Of course, it was this very hierarchy based on inherited privilege that was the target of the



*philosophes*' questioning in the mid and late eighteenth century. Indeed, a stated project of d'Alembert's and Diderot's 1750 *Encyclopédie* was to change the manner in which people thought. Its publication date is one of the reasons why 1750 closes the period in question.

As Phillipe Ariès underscores in his introduction to Volume III of *Histoire de la vie privée*, in the first half of the seventeenth century, also sometimes called the first seventeenth century, the state claimed rights and responsibilities that it was not yet actually able to fulfill. Rather, client networks of nobles filled the void by serving the king at their own expense, to be repaid sporadically, in kind or in favors (17-18). Such a system is not far removed from feudalism, in which peace is maintained through the exchange of protection for land, in a personal relationship between lord and vassals. It is in the second half of the seventeenth century that the state begins to do in fact what it had previously only claimed to do. The Fronde, an unsuccessful series of uprisings by various nobles from 1648-1651, marked the last real challenge to the monarchy. Once on the throne, Louis XIV became increasingly bold in his concentration of power; we may note, for example, that his 1682 move to Versailles and the 1685 revocation of the Edict of Nantes, underscore his confidence in the untouchable nature of his position. Although the later years of his reign and that of Louis XV did little to strengthen the monarchy, France was far from doubting its legitimacy during this time.

In 1748 Montesquieu questioned the uniting of legislative and executive powers in one person, and Rousseau proposed in 1762 that society ought to be composed of individuals who have entered into a free union with all others in a society in which no one enjoys rights that all do not have. As these ideas and others like them began to be debated and dispersed throughout France, the philosophical foundation of the Revolution was being laid.

Because of the explicit link made between the authority of the king over his subjects and that of the husband over his wife, this period of supreme centralization of power in the nation is also one in which French society placed a particular emphasis on the subjugation of wives and children to the head of the household. Haase-Dubosc describes the relationship between the patriarch and the crown as one in which the former is “chef de famille comme fidéicommissaire, chargé de faire fructifier et transmettre le patrimoine aux générations futures.”<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Ariès describes the state as placing its power at the disposal of one member of the family (*Histoire de la vie privée Vol. III* 9) via the *lettres de cachet* that allowed a family to request the quiet imprisonment or banishment of one of its own who had been engaging in errant behavior, thus avoiding public embarrassment. Even those women who were not under the direct authority of a man because they had never married or were widowed lived in the fabric of this society based on the model of family-as-microcosm-of-state. For these reasons, this time of singular emphasis on the subjugation of all France to her king was also one of singular emphasis on the subjugation of women to men.

### French Family and Private Life

#### Primordial Importance of Family, Marriage as its Foundation

There are two facts that cannot be overemphasized. One is stressed by Jean Portemer in his article “Réflexions sur le pouvoir de la femme selon le droit français au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle,” cited by Danielle Haase-Dubosc in “Les Femmes, le droit, et la jurisprudence dans la première moitié du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle.” It is that an individual, whether male or female, was first and foremost a member of a family, and that, in the eyes of the law and society alike, the

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<sup>8</sup> This is her paraphrase of the thesis of an article by Jean Gaudement, “Législation canonique et attitudes séculières à l’égard du lien matrimonial au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle.” *XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 102-103, 1974, 15-30, cited in *Ravie et enlevée*, 21.

individual's first obligation was to obeying, defending, and sacrificing for the family and its interests (51-52). Portemer writes:

La famille domine alors le sort de ses membres, de l'homme comme de la femme. Elle devient un but en soi, une fondation laïque et dynastique, destinée à perpétuer le nom et sauvegarder le patrimoine qui en est le soutien indispensable. Pour parvenir à cette fin, elle mérite tous les sacrifices, des garçons comme des filles, de l'épouse comme de l'époux. (Portemer 190; cited by Haase-Dubosc 51)

Accompanying this notion of the total sovereignty of the family over the individual is marriage as the unique foundation for the family. This is the second aspect of private life under the Ancien Régime that is especially important. Pierre Petot writes,

La famille, sous l'ancien régime, comprenait toutes les personnes unies les unes aux autres par des liens de parenté légitime. En principe, les enfants naturels en étaient exclus à moins qu'ils n'eussent été légitimés par le mariage subséquent de leurs parents.... En définitive, c'est donc sur le mariage, plus précisément sur le mariage chrétien, que reposait toute organisation familiale. (9)

This question of legitimacy and the fact that a child must be legitimate in order to have a family at all will be of great consequence in the discussion of the last of the primary texts, Graffigny's *Cénie*.

### Demographic Overview of the Population

Besides these two fundamental facets of the role of the family in society, let us consider some demographic elements of life during France at this time. Childbirth was very dangerous and often resulted in the death of the mother or the child. Infant mortality rates were very high. Of those children who did survive their first year, many did not reach their tenth birthday, and those who reached adulthood often had lost a parent by that time.

Historical demographers such as Nathalie Davis and Jacques Dupâquier have shown the

effects of the ever-present reality of death on the population. Robert Darnton gives some statistical snapshots of the population:<sup>9</sup>

In Crulai, Normandy, 236 of every 1,000 babies died before their first birthday during the seventeenth century,<sup>10</sup> as opposed to twenty today. About 45 per cent of Frenchmen born in the eighteenth century died before the age of ten.... Stepmothers proliferated everywhere--far more so than stepfathers, as the remarriage rate among widows was one in ten. (27)<sup>11</sup>

Godineau specifies that this combination of a high mortality rate and typical ages of marriage in the late twenties, meant that marriages lasted, on average ten to twelve years in the sixteenth century and fifteen to eighteen years in the eighteenth century, from which we may extrapolate that the figure for the seventeenth century was between those ranges. Davis's research shows that in Bordeaux in the seventeenth century, one third of young apprentices had lost their fathers, as had one half of the young women marrying for the first time (Haase-Dubosc, "Les femmes" 57). The average age at which men married in the eighteenth century was twenty-seven to twenty-eight years old, and twenty-five to twenty-six years for women. Of course, the high likelihood of the death of one parent before all the children reached adulthood combined with the frequency of remarriage meant that the family was not, as she emphasizes, "une cellule stable," but rather, "souvent composée d'enfants de plusieurs lits, élevés par un beau-parent" (27).

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<sup>9</sup> This citation is from the first essay, "Peasants Tell Tales" in Darnton's *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*. New York: First Vintage Books Edition, 1984.

<sup>10</sup> Elisabeth Badinter (*L'amour en plus*) lays much of the blame for the high infant mortality on the practice of sending children to paid wet-nurses almost immediately after birth. Few dispute that this practice contributed heavily to the problem, although the proportion in which malnutrition and general lack of quality medical care contributed, seems not to be clear.

<sup>11</sup> Among the factors that led to widows' relatively infrequent remarriage was the practice of *charivari*, a custom by which young men expressed- on behalf of the community as a whole- disapproval of marriage in which one of the new spouses had previously been married. *Charivari* most often involved banging on pots and pans outside the window of the new couple on their wedding night but in extreme cases could include seizing one or both persons, placing them on a cart, and riding them around the village, while others jeered. Widows marrying never-married men experienced particularly acute forms of this ritual. "Familles. Le privé contre la coutume," Daniel Fabre, *Histoire de la vie privée*.

Besides malnutrition and limited medical care, life in Ancien Régime France was made precarious by the fact that law enforcement was sporadic at best, even from the second half of the seventeenth century forward. Roving bands of thieves, army deserters, and young men hoping to secure social elevation through marriage via abduction made the open road--and sometimes even the town centers<sup>12</sup>--uncertain places to be, especially for women.

Availability of education was also sporadic during the Ancien Régime, but opportunities proliferated, steadily, if slowly, especially after 1650 (Godineau 129). This was due to the fact that a widening variety of schools were opening their doors, schools run by the church as well as secular ones founded in the seventeenth century by a cluster of aristocratic women. While boys' education was inevitably favored over that of girls throughout the period and throughout the country, schools did begin to appear for girls in the seventeenth century. The Protestant Reformation, with its emphasis on the necessity for each believer to be able to read Scripture for him or herself, had a very important role in the spread of the notion that children in all classes and both genders should be literate. Lest we entertain exaggerated notions of the reach of these early attempts at educating the population, however, consider that, between 1686 and 1690, only 14% of French women and 29% of French men could sign their marriage certificates (134).<sup>13</sup> As we see, not only is a striking minority of the population able to sign their names, but women are about half as likely as men to do so.

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<sup>12</sup> One of the examples described by Haase-Dubosc in *Ravie et enlevée* concerns a young woman who was abducted as she was leaving mass in Reims in 1643 (188).

<sup>13</sup> Godineau draws these statistics from a survey done in the nineteenth century by a minister Maggiolo.

Aristocratic families tended to send their daughters into the convent to be educated, around age ten or twelve.<sup>14</sup> There, a young girl would stay until the family had chosen a mate for her. As Graffigny's heroine Zilia and Lambert's mentor both express in scathing terms, the so-called education that girls received at the convent was often little more than admonitions about proper morals and religious instruction. Sometimes, however, as Castan's essay informs us, stays in the convent had the positive effect of allowing girls to establish friendships that lasted their whole lives. A girl would otherwise probably not make a connection with anyone of either sex unknown to her family. Castan's description of a mid-seventeenth-century friendship between two women from Auch, who met in a convent, implies a complicity suggesting that the women's friendship presented something of a rivalry to their marriages. In any case, it seems clear that both women were strengthened and emboldened by the relationship:

...leur relation survit au mariage; elles s'invitent pour de longs séjours à la campagne; les confidences, les intrigues et une active correspondance les occupent pendant des années ; au point d'empiéter sur leur vie familiale et d'indisposer leurs maris.

Castan observes, "... en fin de compte, le couvent offre aux filles, au même titre que le collège pour les garçons, la possibilité de vivre et de s'éprouver hors [du] monde familial ...” (425).<sup>15</sup> Although such friendships offered happy results for some women, for many, like Lambert's mentor, time in the convent served merely to protect their virtue and reputation but provided neither solid education nor preparation for the married lives that lay ahead.

Young girls from aristocratic families were able, unlike girls from most economic sets, to establish friendships with others unknown to their families. This does not mean, however, that they were the only ones to form strong bonds with other women. Castan writes

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<sup>14</sup> The experience of Anne Thérèse de Lambert (1647-1733), who was put in a convent from the age of twelve until the age of seventeen, seems to be quite typical (Lambert 126).

<sup>15</sup> Castan's article, "Le public et le particulier" is found in Ariès *et al's Histoire de la vie privée*, Vol. III.

of the great solidarity, practical as well as psychological, that existed among women in different classes.

Pourtant on perçoit à l'intérieur du monde féminin toute une circulation souterraine d'argent, de vivres, de nippes ou de services, pratiquée souvent à l'insu des hommes. Elle réfracte des initiatives particulières, menues certes, mais significatives; c'est une femme de travailleur de Montauban qui emprunte quelques sous à sa voisine pour acheter des rubans à sa fille qui doit tenter sa chance par le jeu de la coquetterie.... ...[U]ne servante de Montpellier... confie à son amie ses trois années de gages. Elle a capitalisé pour s'établir, mais elle ne veut surtout pas livrer le trésor à famille.... ...[L]a nourriture [est] apportée dans la rue par deux proches voisines ("par bonne amitié" disent-elles) à une femme de laboureur du Bigorre. L'occasion? Les raclées administrées par le mari, un brutal. Mieux encore, la réaction d'une mère, instruite de la mort soudaine de son fils; loin de se réfugier dans le sein de la famille, elle se précipite dans la rue et va se jeter en pleurant dans les bras de la voisine. (421; 423)

As we can see, women from aristocratic families as well as from the working classes found solace, companionship, and support in friendships with other women, whether they encountered those friends in the convent or in the village wash-area.

### Marriage in the Ancien Régime

#### A Battle for Control over Marriage

Until the sixteenth century, the church possessed unquestioned dominion over marriage. Mutual consent of the two parties, after consummation, constituted a valid marriage (Petot 9; Godineau 27). Beginning in 1556 with an edict issued by Henri II, the kings of France gradually began to claim authority over this act that had previously been a purely religious sacrament. That edict proclaimed that all "enfants de famille," meaning all *legitimate* children,<sup>16</sup> regardless of social class, who had contracted marriages without their parents' permission and who had not yet attained the age of majority--for the state, twenty-five for women and thirty for men--could, according to the crown, be disinherited. This proclamation was in direct contradiction to the church's position, reaffirmed in the Council

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<sup>16</sup> Note, once again, the primordial importance of *legitimacy*, in giving one rightful claim to a family at all.

of Trent in 1547 and in 1563, that marriage was a sacrament that relied solely on mutual consent of the two parties, aged at least twelve for females and fourteen for males. So, as Haase-Dubosc underscores in *Ravie et enlevée*, there thus began a several-centuries-long battle between the church and the crown over the control of marriage. At issue was the basic question of whether marriage was ultimately an individual choice, or one to be made by the head of the household. In addition to being a question of the rights of an individual, this issue is particularly pertinent to women's situations for several reasons.

First, the fact that women were expected to suffer quietly the infidelities of a spouse yet be faithful in return meant that the consequences of an unhappy marriage were arguably far graver for women than for men. Second, the fact that women took not only their husband's names, but also their titles and social standings, meant that, as discussed here, a woman could not marry down the social ladder without losing her own status, but a man could. This, in turn, meant that a man stood a much better chance than a woman of acquiring parental approval for a match with a lover of lower social standing. In 1560, Henri II issued another edict, this time associating marriages unauthorized by the couple's parents with *rapt*-violent abduction. A whole series of royal edicts followed. Those of 1579, 1606, 1639, 1681, and 1697 brought increasingly harsh penalties, until the young man in question, the *enleveur* or *ravisieur*, was subject to the death penalty, and the disinheritance of both parties could include the *portion légitime*--which had remained protected until the edict of 1697. As Haase-Dubosc observes, the fact that the crown found successive edicts necessary indicates that despite all the risks run, couples--and abductors--continued various forms of *enlèvements*. This phenomenon brings us to the third reason why the crown's gradual appropriation of authority over marriage has particular importance regarding women.



### Enlèvement: a double-edged sword

The Edict of 1560, which put into one category those who had initiated clandestine marriages and those who had abducted women by force, associated under the one title *enlèvement* events in which women were victimized and those in which women showed the willingness and capacity for tremendous agency in the face of great threats. Interestingly, the goal in each case was the same--marriage--and to a large degree, the reason that each strategy was a possibility for the *enleveur* or couple in question is that the *enlèvement* could be interpreted in the manner contrary to its nature. Both kinds of *enlèvements* rested, ultimately, on the universal acceptance of women's weakness. That is, a young woman could hope to be forgiven for having eloped with her lover because there was always the sense that, even if the event were not violent, she was perhaps in some sense taken against her will.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, the strategy of abducting a woman of high birth and eventual fortune, in the hopes of marrying her, was one that rested on the assumption that women were of weak moral constitution--thus making believable a story of a woman's *asking* to be abducted for a clandestine marriage. The high value placed on family dignity rather than on individual happiness meant that, even if a family believed that a daughter might have been abducted against her will, it might consent to a marriage with the abductor in order to save the family honor.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> This becomes quite clear in Marivaux's *La mère confidente*, which we shall consider in detail in Chapter 6. The *enlèvement* in question is clearly one of a young couple's running away in order to escape parental disapproval rather than one of force. Nevertheless, it is the young man who bears the brunt of the mother's disapproval when she learns of the proposed plot.

<sup>18</sup> I am grateful for Danielle Haase-Dubosc's scholarship on this subject, which has called my attention to this important phenomenon in seventeenth-century France. She first explores the topic in an article "Ravie et enlevée au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle," that appears in the collection of essays that she edited with Eliane Viennot, *Femmes et pouvoirs sous l'Ancien Régime*, Editions Rivages, Paris, 1991, and follows with the

The church certainly disapproved of marriages carried out without parental consent, witnesses, or the blessing of a priest, but it viewed a couple as married nonetheless. Let us recall Petot's observation that in Ancien Régime France, all family structure is founded on Christian marriage. Thus, for the crown, clandestine marriages stripped the head of the family of the ability to determine who his progeny would be and therefore who would be the guardians of the family patrimony. If we accept Portemer's conclusion that the family was "un but en soi," clandestine marriages certainly drastically undermined that "goal" by completely fracturing the line of command and the intended line of inheritance.

### Single Women and Widows

Past the age of twenty-five, the age at which a woman reached legal majority, an unmarried woman, whether widowed or never married, was a full legal entity, able to bring a complaint, testify in court, and buy and sell property. Widows with children held the authority that had once been that of both parents--unless the father's will constrained her in some way, in which case his word was binding. Thus, legally, these women "hors mariage" enjoyed a liberty unknown to others. We must, however, realize that practical limitations meant that in reality, maintaining an independent life was a formidable proposition indeed. First, a woman could only with great difficulty and good fortune practice a profession whereby she might earn a living in her own right. Widows of artisans were sometimes permitted by the local guild to continue operating the business, because they had often been *de facto* business partners, working side-by-side with their husbands for many years and knew the trade as well as any assistants. It was often the case, though, that they were not

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monograph *Ravie et enlevée: De l'enlèvement des femmes comme stratégie matrimoniale au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Bibliothèque Albin Michel, Paris, 1999. Wendy Gibson also makes mention of the phenomenon in *Women in Seventeenth Century France*, 50.

permitted to hire any new employees. This meant, of course, that if a woman had the good fortune to be widowed by a spouse with relatively young apprentices, she might continue running the shop for many years; if not, as they died or left, the shop died with them. As we know, a few women made their living through writing, although never without hesitation and the realization that many associated authorship with being a “public woman,” with all the connotations of the phrase. Nonetheless, following in the footsteps of Christine de Pisan, Scudéry and Graffigny, and a few others maintained themselves by the work of their pens, but not without significant hardship.

Second, there is the question of inheritance. Since a woman’s possibilities for earning a living were so limited, she generally needed, if she was to live unmarried, a substantial inheritance either from parents or from a husband. The practice of primogeniture, concerned with keeping the family wealth concentrated rather than dispersed among several heirs, meant that daughters, along with second and third sons, had claim only to a small inheritance--a *portion légitime*<sup>19</sup>--that seldom, if ever, constituted enough to live on by itself. Otherwise, a daughter was provided with whatever dowry the family could afford, sometimes supplemented by the young woman’s own wages. Working to save money for the dowry was one of the reasons why some women married in their late twenties, rather than teens, as this allowed them to work, perhaps as governesses in other households, for several years and thereby amass a more substantial dowry. The price of dowries rose at such an alarming rate that in 1700, 42% of the sisters of dukes and peers remained unmarried (compared to 20% of men). This was because some of the wealthiest families amassed a dowry for only one daughter and sent the others to a convent. This was possible because the most privileged

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<sup>19</sup> Dorante, the heroine’s suitor in Marivaux’s *La mère confidente*, will receive only the *portion légitime*, which provokes the initial conflict between the young lovers and the heroine’s mother.

families could send their daughters into convents without paying themselves. For those whose fortune was less extravagant, Godineau writes,

...celles restées dans le siècle sont accueillies par le frère aîné ou des membres du lignage chez qui elles servent de gouvernante pour les enfants, ou se glissent dans le sillage d'une famille puissante où elles ont un statut ambigu d'amie dépendante, plus ou moins entretenue. (50)

As we see, the decision to remain single was one to be made with great care, for without some means of financial support, a woman could easily find herself not only dependent, as Lambert's mentor shrewdly observes that all women were, but dependent in a household where she was a servant rather than the presumed mistress of the house. To work as governess for the children of a relative amounted to a demotion in class, to serve those who had been her peers.

One might conclude that widows were the one group of women who simultaneously enjoyed freedom, full legal standing, and financial independence. As a group, it is true that they did indeed have more of those advantages than did other women. It was not the case, however, that widows simply inherited all that had belonged to the couple. A man did not even have the right to make a will giving such specifications. Rather, a man's widow and his heirs were considered under the law to be two distinct legal identities with separate claims and rights. Here again, the difference between the northern regions, the *pays de coutumes*, and the region south of the La Rochelle-Geneva line, *le pays de droit*, becomes important. In the north, marriage was considered under the law to be a community, of which the husband was the head, and into which both parties could bring property. In both regions, a widow was entitled to a *douaire*, a fixed income intended to pay living expenses during her lifetime. It was not property as such, but rather the right to a percentage of the earnings from property. The proportion of the earnings from property that constituted the *douaire* also

varied from region to region, as low as  $\frac{1}{4}$  in some areas and as high as  $\frac{1}{2}$  in Paris. It should also be noted that a very close tie was made between the *douaire* and sexual availability. The common understanding was that it was precisely the wife's assumed constant affection for her husband and availability to him sexually that earned her the right to the *douaire*. She could lose it through adultery during the marriage or "debauchery" in widowhood. Notice then, that this was one of the very few means available for a woman of any age, or marital status to live in financial independence, and yet, that livelihood could be taken away for bad behavior. Men's misbehavior, on the other hand, was generally taken for granted as a fact of life, and even when it was reproved by the community, disciplinary action almost never extended to threatening their means of financial support. It also bears observing with Longino that widows often found themselves on the social periphery of their communities. With those caveats, it remains true that widows enjoyed by far the most independence of any group of women in Ancien Régime France.

#### Women's Status: Laws, Theories, and Realities

Clearly, practical considerations and social attitudes often were at least as influential as laws in determining what women's lives were like. In conjugal life, this was no less true. For example, the narrator in Lambert's "Conseils importants d'une amie" reports being married at age eighteen to a husband of thirty and realizing, while in the agony of childbirth, that he was being polite to her but had no real tenderness for her. Soon after the birth of their child, she recounts learning that he had begun an affair with one of the servants, and she tells of her humiliation in being the last in the household to learn of this. She recalls her father's reaction to her tearful telling of this story:

...il me dit que j'étais bien simple de me chagriner de si peu de chose.... Je répondis à mon père... est-ce que l'on ne se marie pas, Monsieur... pour s'être fidèles? Mon père se mit à rire de ma question, et me répondit que quand j'aurais plus d'usage de monde, je verrais que l'on ne s'embarrassait pas de ces bagatelles-là : qu'une femme ne prenait garde à la conduite de son mari, que c'était à elle d'être sage.... (216-217)

This story of the outrage and disappointment of a young woman who married with the assumption that both partners made the same commitment of fidelity to one another comes to us uniquely because the speaker--and in turn, her listener, the author--found it extraordinary. As it is an attitude, a set of assumptions, rather than a law, it is not the kind of evidence to which one can refer and say, "This was universally true for all women in France at this time." Nevertheless, the anecdote provides a rare and piercing gaze into a world that is lost to us, and allows us access to a perspective that does not always come from public records.

On the other hand, certain expectations of husbands did exist. Particularly in urban areas where neighbors lived in close proximity to one another, husbands--as well as wives and children--were held accountable to the general opinion of the neighborhood. A wife could go to the local constable and complain that her husband was staying out too late, spending the family money at the tavern, and dishonoring the family. The local official might then interview the neighbors to discern if that were, in fact, the case. If the husband were deemed guilty as charged, he could be locked in jail--and often was, for several days. Godineau cites examples of wording from *lettres de cachet* by which women requested the internment of their husbands: "[Il] refuse le nécessaire pour la dépense journalière de la nourriture de la maison" and "[Il a] toujours dépensé au cabaret ce qu'il gagnait sans avoir aucun soin de sa famille" (33). After a few days, though, the need for the husband's income often outweighed the wife's desire to mend his behavior, and she would request his release. Here, we can see that men were held to certain expectations and that women had certain avenues to modify their mates' behavior. Thus, men's dominion was not absolute. On the

other hand, the reality usually was that the husband was needed for income, so however bad his behavior, he was unlikely to stay in jail for long.

Juxtapositions of legal possibilities for women and the limitations of reality may be found in other instances. For example, although divorce did not exist, the church did allow, in certain extreme circumstances, for a *séparations de biens*, usually instituted if the husband was deemed to be mismanaging the family money, or a *séparation de corps*, almost always accompanied by the former. The latter allowance was made when it was judged that a woman's life or soul was in danger. The *séparation de corps*, however, did not allow either party to remarry or enter into an intimate relationship, as the vows of fidelity were considered sacred for life. This of course meant that the decision to leave a husband essentially meant accepting a life of permanent financial precariousness, since a woman in that situation would generally benefit neither from her estranged husband's income, nor from that of a second husband, nor from the *douaire* to which a widow was entitled. Indeed, it was in this very situation that Graffigny found herself, thus becoming the kind of *amie dépendante* described by Godineau, before she turned to writing.

Not every element of the law differentiating between men and women worked against women. Widows were not generally held responsible for debt incurred by the couple during their husbands' lifetimes, because they were construed not to have contributed to the decisions that led to the debt. Hence, a widow could collect her *douaire* before every other creditor to her deceased husband's estate. Like the abducted brides who could be perceived as helpless and therefore guiltless, however, this exemption from debt came at a heavy price. Widows had protection in the law from the poor financial decisions of husbands precisely because they had been judged incompetent to make financial decisions in the first place.

## Conclusion

It was possible for women to have full legal standing if unmarried or widowed, to live independently if widowed and married relatively well, and even to practice a profession as long as it was the one left by her husband. Women in France walked openly in the street, looked men in the eye, moved around town unaccompanied, and entertained in their homes.

It is nevertheless clear that, as Lambert's mentor so clearly phrased it to her:

Il n'y a point d'indépendante: on dépend ou de ses supérieurs ou de ses parents: les femmes dépendent de leurs maris ou des bienséances. Il faut s'accoutumer de bonne heure à la dépendance.... Nous ne sommes pas nées pour jouir de notre liberté ; les usages s'y opposent.... La femme la plus libre conviendra, si elle est sincère, qu'elle a bien des choses qui la gênent. (199)

Women in France between 1650 and 1750, like men, were defined by their roles in their families and their social positions. Like men, they lived with the constant threat of early death and were likely to have lost a parent by the time they reached adulthood. Unlike men, they were systemically viewed as inferior, they were much more poorly educated than men, and, if married, they were expected to be subject to their husbands. Wives' obedience to their husbands was seen as a clear reflection of subjects' obedience to the king. Widows who had married well and unmarried women who had inherited a tidy sum or who were somehow able to earn their living enjoyed a high degree of independence. Women were far more likely, though, to be married, in a convent, or to live with a friend or relative willing to shelter them. As France's monarchy increased and centralized its power, queen mothers and wives were banished from the royal council, so that a role model for women throughout France no longer existed in the place of greatest power. It is in this context that we turn to the literature of the period to see how women were represented as helping one another. As we have seen through some of the examples cited by Castan, women in various classes gave



assistance, encouragement, and companionship to other women in critical ways. How does this phenomenon--which strikes me as so vitally important during this particular period--appear in the literature that was being produced in France at the time? That is the question that we shall explore through the lens of mentoring, specifically, how women are represented as mentoring other women in this context.

## Chapter 3

### Mentoring: Terms, Myths, and Models

Daignez me protéger, me conduire, me tenir lieu de mère...  
-Cénie to Orphise in *Cénie* 4.1

#### Importance of the *Mentoring* Concept to this Literary Study

This study examines texts that tell the stories of six young women during times of transition in their lives. They wonder if they will marry, how they will live, what kind of lives they will have. As we have seen in the previous chapter, marriage was, for most women in Ancien Régime France, not only a family expectation but also the surest means of securing economic stability. At the same time, the non-existence of divorce, the impossibility of remarriage even in the case of a separation, and the double standard placed on women's fidelity combined to mean that the choices surrounding marriage were ones that could not be undone. Women who remained single frequently struggled financially. Economic and social pressures combined and often competed, presenting young women with situations for which adolescence in a convent hardly prepared them. The adult world into which they went was one that severely limited their options while also imposing behavioral expectations and health and safety hazards unique to women. If another woman who had weathered some of these challenges could provide some guidance, it was likely to be sorely needed. The representation in literature of relationships offering such guidance testifies to its existence--or at least some authors' wish for it--in French society at the time.

It is that kind of relationship between characters in literature that is examined here. This study grew from an apparent similarity in the complicity and devotion between two female friends in Scudéry's "Mathilde," the title character, and her companion Laure as well as between the heiress-governess/ mother-daughter pair Orphise and Cénie in Graffigny's *Cénie*. Though one was a relationship between friends close in age and the other a mother and daughter pair, both relationships are characterized by the fact that one woman has wisdom to offer the other one, yet not direct authority over her. It is a dynamic found in friendship and between a parent and child, but not exclusive to either of those. The common thread seemed to be what happened between the individuals--guidance and help for the less experienced one--rather than what brought them together. The other commonality was that the assistance was temporary. If the relationship was ongoing, then mentoring was a phase in it rather than its entirety.

The *New Oxford Dictionary* indicates the *Odyssey* as the source of *mentoring*. Various kinds of literature on the topic-- ranging from classics scholars to business managers to greeting cards--indicate that the term is much-used but with little agreement on its meaning. This problem is made more complex by the fact that definitions are sometimes other ways of saying what mentoring *should* be. In order to discuss the concept with clarity, it is therefore necessary to consider the word's origins, some models of it, how it is understood in our twenty-first-century world, and how it applies to this study.

This chapter explores the term *mentor*, its meaning, and the companion word used to describe the person mentored. It reviews the storyline of the *Odyssey* and highlights key moments in the epic that provide images of mentoring. A review of contemporary uses of the term continues the discussion, followed by a brief recounting of a seventeenth-century

French version of Telemachus's journey, *Les Aventures de Télémaque* by Fénelon. We then consider another poem born in ancient Greece approximately a century after the *Odyssey*, the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter*. It is so called because it belongs to the same literary tradition as the *Illiad* and the *Odyssey* and features much phraseology in common with them. The *Hymn to Demeter* may be read as the narrative of another myth that emphasizes the importance of "threshold figures" (Felson-Rubin 89) or "psychological midwives" (Agha-Jaffar 91) to a person undergoing a period of transition. Finally, we shall consider a definition of mentoring to provide a framework for the discussions to follow.

#### Terminology: *Mentor*, *to Mentor*, *Protégé(e)*

##### *Mentor*, *to Mentor*

The *New American Oxford Dictionary* defines the noun *mentor*, the word's original form, as "a trusted advisor" and the resulting modern verb *to mentor* as "to advise or to train." The term *mentoring* originates from Homer's *Odyssey*, ca. 750 B.C.E. In that tale, Odysseus's son Telemachus is guided and advised by the goddess Athena, who is disguised as his father's trusted friend Mentōr. As underscored by Susan Wiltshire in *Athena's Disguises*, Telemachus is not the only recipient of Athena's gifts of guidance and companionship, just as the face of Mentōr is not Athena's only disguise.<sup>20</sup> The goddess intervenes repeatedly on behalf of Odysseus, of Telemachus, and of Penelope, Odysseus's wife and Telemachus's mother. At different moments in the *Odyssey*, Athena is a young girl pointing the way, a trusted male friend preparing a ship for a long voyage--and offering to

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<sup>20</sup> My debt to Wiltshire's scholarship and thoughtful reading of the poem is great. It is her book that called to my attention the multi-faceted nature of Athena's mentoring and the specific incidents in the text, discussed here, that demonstrate it.

come along--and a comforting sister to Penelope. The gender of her disguises shifts, as does that of those she helps.

### Protégé(e)

The term *protégé(e)* shall refer to the one mentored. Since this study focuses on women mentoring women, discussion of the works in question will require *protégée*, the feminine form. The *New Oxford American Dictionary* defines *protégé(e)* as “a person who is guided and supported by an older and more experienced person” and notes that the word comes to English from eighteenth-century French, when, of course, it meant *protected* as the past participle of *proteger* or, as a noun, “one is who is protected.” The French in turn comes from the Latin *protegere*, “to cover in front”: *pro* meaning “in front” and *tegere* meaning “to cover.” We must note the imperfection apparent in this term: as underscored in the previous chapter, the ability of women to protect other women in Ancien Régime France was, in fact, limited.

Contemporary discussion of mentoring features both the terms *protégé(e)* and *mentee*, sometimes interchangeably, and sometimes for different purposes. In his introduction to *The Situational Mentor: An International Review of Competences and Capabilities in Mentoring* (2004), David Clutterbuck writes, introducing an anthology of essays on the topic,

...[T]he use of the different terms ‘protégé’ and ‘mentee’ appear frequently throughout the text and can be explained in that ‘protégé’ tends to be used in a sponsorship type of mentoring relationship. ‘Mentee’ is more common in the developmental style of mentoring.” (xx)

The Harvard Business Essentials volume offers this perspective:

This book uses the term *protégé* when referring to the individual being mentored. The term’s Latin origin (*protegere*) implies a protected person or a “favorite.” But general usage implies a person whose career is being advanced by someone with experience or influence. The term *protégé* is superior, in our view, to the modern business-speak: “mentee.” We hope that readers agree. (78)

While it may be true that many people infer the different styles Clutterbuck specifies from the respective terms, *protégée* here does not imply a sponsorship-style of mentoring. Rather, I use it in place of the alternative because *mentee*, absent from many dictionaries of English, implies a verb of which it is the direct object or past participle form. As *Mentōr* is a proper name rather than a verb, and it is only a coincidence that it bears a strong resemblance to the infinitive form of a French verb, it seems preferable to avoid clouding that distinction.

### Homer's *Odyssey*, Source of *Mentoring*

The action of the *Odyssey* opens with the gods and goddesses convened in council on Mount Olympus after Odysseus, king of Ithaca, has led the Greeks in the destruction of Troy. The hero, however, has not been allowed to return home, for he has incurred the wrath of Poseidon, god of the sea. Athena argues in his defense, pleading, “‘But the heart in me is torn for the sake of wise Odysseus.... Why, Zeus, are you now so harsh with him?’” (I.48; I.62).<sup>21</sup> Zeus agrees to allow the king's return, and Athena announces,

‘But I shall make my way to Ithaka, so that I may stir up his son a little, and put some confidence in him... and I will convey him into Sparta and to sandy Pylos to ask after his dear father's homecoming, if he can hear something, and so that among people he may win a good reputation.’ (I.88-95)

She then does that very thing, and the next scene features the pivotal meeting when Athena, now disguised as Mentor, initiates her relationship with Telemachus. During Odysseus's long absence, the boorish group of suitors hoping for the hand of his wife Penelope has taken up residence in the palace and is rapidly depleting the household's supplies, while Telemachus sits by helplessly. Their behavior constitutes a grave violation of one of the most sacrosanct codes in ancient Greek culture: that of the proper behavior between guest

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<sup>21</sup> This and all citations from the *Odyssey* are from the translation of Richard Lattimore, Harper Collins, 1975.

and host. The suitors ignore the norms of hospitality by taking what is not offered them and thereby depriving their would-be host of his role and his honor. As Wiltshire underscores, Athena's arrival at the door, where she politely waits for the young man to invite her into his home, provides him the opportunity to function as an adult treating a guest with civility ( ): "...[H]e saw Athene and went straight to the forecourt, the heart within him scandalized that a guest should still be standing at the doors" (I.118-120). As they talk, the goddess immediately sets to her task of "stirring up" her young charge, telling him that he must inquire after his father to learn if he is living or dead and call an assembly, where he will sit in his father's seat to expose the suitors' bad behavior to the community. She then prepares a ship for him to make the voyage she has assigned him and offers to accompany him. The help that she offers includes requiring him to play new adult roles in both public and private spheres, giving advice and encouragement, providing practical help in the form of preparation for the journey and companionship.

As Wiltshire notes, the goddess helps all three family members in important ways. To Penelope, she offers reassurance of her son's safety. The mother learns that Telemachus has gone before she can bid him farewell, and she now worries that she will have lost both husband and child to distant seas. Whereas Athena takes the form of Mentor in guiding Telemachus, she comes to Penelope as the woman's sister. She slips into her bedroom at night and comforts her by telling her not to worry about her son, that he has an able companion with him. Thus although the *Odyssey* is, as an epic, a tale of adventure focused largely on men and their actions, this brief scene between two women gives an intimate glimpse of female mentoring.

Our ever-present guide helps the title character in many ways, including, as in the first scene of the poem, advocating on his behalf to Zeus in the council of the deities.

Another example of this assistance occurs in the sixth book. The hero washes up on the Phaeacian shore, “suffering one more shipwreck through the wrath of Poseidon” (Wiltshire 73). By taking the form of the best friend of the young princess Nausicaa and suggesting to her that she go down to the water and wash her clothes, so that she might look her best and thereby find a husband, Athena ensures that at that moment Odysseus is greeted well.

Wiltshire reads this scene as a moment when the focus shifts slightly:

One might reasonably argue that Athena’s disguise here as Nausicaa’s friend is meant to help Odysseus, not Nausicaa. The *Odyssey* poem is a poem of many journeys, however, not only the hero’s. Here Homer tells of the movement into maturity of the young princess. Without the goddess’s encouragement in the form of her friend, Nausicaa would never have left home on the journey that brings her toward her adulthood, just as a journey with the same divine guidance brought Telemachus toward his. (75)

Here we also see the phenomenon that Agha-Jaffar highlights in the *Hymn to Demeter*, in a scene when a mourning and wandering Demeter, in the form of an old woman, encounters four young girls at a well and asks them where she might find work and lodging. In the *Odyssey*, the princess Nausicaa similarly acts as both source of information and hostess. She knows that she must not be seen bringing a strange man back into town, and so she devises an alternative plan. She addresses him:

Rise up, now, stranger, to go to the city, so I can see you to the house of my prudent father.... Then, stranger, understand what I say, in order to win escort and a voyage home from my father. You will find a glorious grove of poplars sacred to Athene near the road.... Sit down there and wait for time enough for the rest of us to reach the town and make our way to my father’s palace.... [T]hen go to the city of the Phaiakians and inquire for the palace of my father, great-hearted Alkinōos.... Go on past [my father] and then with your arms embrace our mother’s knees; do this, so as to behold your day of homecoming with happiness and speed, even if you live very far off. (VI.255-312)

An encounter with the disguised Athena has mobilized the young princess. We meet her when she is safe and secure in her father’s palace, protected and dependent, and, we might imagine, not exercising a great deal of agency. In the form of the girl’s friend, Athena



propels her on a course of action that leads her into contact with an unknown man. Nausicaa is not afraid, unlike her fearful companions who run at the sight of the shipwrecked and naked Odysseus: “Only the daughter of Alkinoös stood fast, for Athene put courage into her heart, and took the fear from her body, and she stood her ground and faced him...” (VI.139-141). The strong, almost militaristic language emphasizes the young princess’s courage and firmness. Like Telemachus in his initial encounter with Athena, Nausicaa is presented with an apparent traveler, one who needs her help, and she has the opportunity--or, as it might have been understood in ancient Greece, the responsibility--to offer hospitality to the stranger. An important difference between this meeting and the one experienced by Telemachus, however, is that, as a man who saw another man at the door, Telemachus was able, within the confines of the socially acceptable, to open the door for Mentor/Athena and invite the guest into his home. The princess, an unmarried young woman some distance from town with only her female attendants, could not bring Odysseus back to the palace herself. Like women in Ancien Régime France, Nausicaa possessed familiarity with the local behavioral codes and power structure, but, although she had some access to power via her father, she was not and would never be a wielder of it. The best help that she could offer the stranger was advice about how to attain his goal.

Both Nausicaa and Odysseus are mentored by Athena in this encounter with her and with each other. Both progress in their respective journeys. As a result of this meeting, the hero moves closer to his return home to Ithaca, and the princess approaches adulthood and greater agency. Hospitality is an important element of this mentoring. For Odysseus, that gift allows him to continue, and for Nausicaa, the opportunity to offer it to another requires of her maturity and strength. In this manner, the exchange also constitutes an example of

reciprocity in mentoring. Nausicaa's gifts of information, welcome, and shelter allow Odysseus to progress, while his unexpected arrival also furthers her development. Each of them mentors the other.

As the parallel stories of Odysseus, Telemachus, and Penelope proceed, Athena continues to help each of them in various ways. As seen in the encounter with Nausicaa, the different manifestations of the goddess's help create a text that suggests that mentoring may come from many sources and often in unexpected ways. This idea is central to Wiltshire's reading of the text. Some, however, read Athena not as an agent of promoting a plurality in guidance but rather one who reinforces the position of the powerful. Because the myth is almost always mentioned when defining mentoring, the manner in which the goddess/Mentor is interpreted largely shapes how the concept is viewed. With this in mind, we shall now explore some views of Athena and her doings.

#### Review of Contemporary Literature on Mentoring

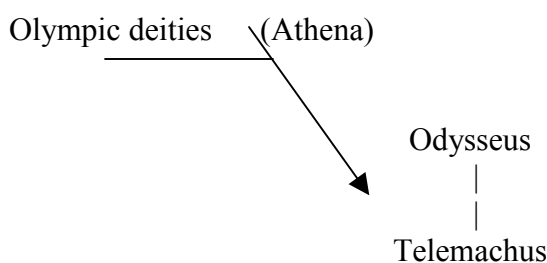
Wherever mentoring is discussed or defined, the *Odyssey* and its characters are evoked, with greatly varying degrees of accuracy. Frequently, the fact that Mentōr was merely Athena's disguise is omitted completely, and Mentor is identified as the young man's guide. In any case, the epic serves as a touchstone, and as Helen Colley suggests, a powerful legitimizing force for both the meaning and the worthiness of the practice in a great variety of sources.

Recently-published works on mentoring demonstrate the breadth of perspectives on the practice. Some examples are a critical study of a mentoring program in England intended to put disaffected youth to work, discussions of how the practice can be an effective business

tool, a study of how it can benefit at-risk children and adolescents, and a collection of essays treating topics like what qualities people attribute to those whom they see as mentors. Each of these approaches emphasizes a different understanding of what mentoring is and should be.

A possibility raised in Colley's *Mentoring for Social Inclusion* is the idea that a mentor could be operating in the interest of a powerful third party. Using a feminist and Marxist framework, E. Reed, paraphrased by Colley,<sup>22</sup> has argued that Athena's intervention, now a prototype for a nurturing relationship, was in fact not personal at all but rather political. Reed argues that at the time the epic was composed, Greece was transitioning from a primarily matriarchal structure to a patriarchal one and that the goddess's decision to lavish her wisdom on Telemachus was based on the importance of reinforcing Odysseus's position as king and on the roles that each of them played in a larger structure: she was one of the powerful Olympian deities and he, the heir to the throne. Their relationship might be thus be conveyed in the schematic that follows.

Diagram 1: Athena-Mentor as Agent of the Olympic Deities



Such an interpretation suggests that their relationship depended not on any particular affection that she had for the young man but rather was defined by the interest the deities had in maintaining that power structure.

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<sup>22</sup> Colley summarizes Reed's interpretation in *Mentoring for Social Inclusion* (41-42).

In light of Reed's proposition, critical questions arise: Does Athena really care about Telemachus as an individual? Is her help for him really just a means of keeping power and wealth centralized by protecting the king's household and his heir? While discussing the relationships in the six primary texts, one of the questions we shall consider is to what extent each relationship is situated within a larger power structure and to what extent the bond between the two individuals depends upon affection. Implied in those questions are the additional issues of which person initiates the relationship, who chooses the goals, and what degree of control the protégé exercises.

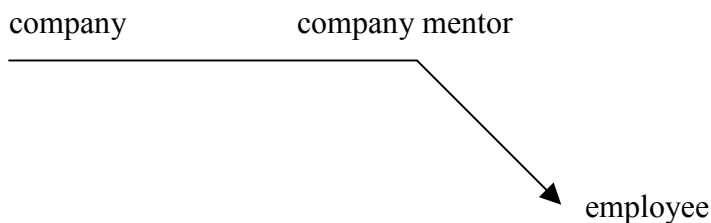
While reviewing these writings, one irony stood out for me. The books written from a business standpoint tend to present mentoring as an essentially elitist practice. Its purpose, in that context, is not to bring out the best in everybody, but rather to develop those deemed worthy of the effort. On the other hand, the same term is used in literature on children and adolescents to describe a practice that is quite the opposite: an intervention whose purpose is to bolster young people who might otherwise fall through the cracks by giving them extra attention, encouragement, and challenge. There appears to be a fundamental gap between these two notions of mentoring. One view promotes giving further advantage to those who are already successful or fortunate, while the other seeks to rescue, via mentoring, those in a society most in need of extra help.

Harvard Business School Press has published a volume called *Coaching and Mentoring: How to Develop Top Talent and Achieve Stronger Performance*. In a discussion of mentoring, the authors consider its cost and benefits, noting that the cost is in the mentor's time and commitment, and that one benefit is in "retention of valued employees" (81). This point is further explained:

Not all turnover is bad.... Turnover creates opportunities to fill vacancies with more qualified people.... The challenge to companies is 1) to confine turnover to the ranks of low performers and among job categories that are easy and inexpensive to fill and 2) to aggressively combat turnover among high-value-adding employees. Mentoring is one approach to retaining high-value-adding employees. (83)

These authors' approach to mentoring is clearly one that values the good of the company, rather than the individual. A "high-value-adding" employee in a job category that is not "inexpensive and easy to fill" must be retained for the good of the company because losing him would hurt the bottom line. The mentor assigned to the employee in that situation, then, is acting as a *representative* of the larger structure that she represents. Such a relationship may be *represented* by the same schema as was Reed's interpretation of Athena's mentoring, where the company substitutes for the Olympian deities, and company mentor fills the role of Athena as agent of the power structure:

Diagram 2: Company-selected Mentor as its Agent



The relationship is not protégé-driven because there is only one acceptable direction in which to progress: to further the interests of the company.

On the other hand, Buckley and Zimmerman's *Mentoring Children and Adolescents* presents a radically different framework for who needs mentoring and why, a perspective shift that carries significant implications for what mentoring can mean. As do most works on the topic, this one situates the *Odyssey* as the reference point:

The term "mentoring" is alleged to have its origin in Homer's *Odyssey*, when an older friend named Mentor cared for King Odysseus son, Telemachus, while the king fought in the Trojan Wars. In leaving Telemachus in the care of Mentor, the king not only entrusted his child's safety to Mentor, but also his son's physical, emotional, and educational development. (1)

The authors use *child* to refer to Telemachus, and the verb *care for* as what occurred, focusing on his vulnerability. This is clearly a view of mentoring as nurturing, with the good of the individual in the foreground. In discussing the importance of the practice, the authors cite the reasons why certain groups of young people are in particular need:

For at-risk youth in particular, early learning in social relationships may limit their sense of potential adult roles. Minority youth, who grow up with an acute awareness of societal barriers to opportunities, may come to view certain pathways as blocked. Traumatized youth often show a lack of future orientation.... (7)

This concern for the needs of at-risk, minority, and traumatized young people stands in stark contrast with the emphasis of the Harvard Business Essentials volume on limiting job turnover to the ranks of those who are easiest to replace.

While these two examples demonstrate the wide variety of reasons why mentoring is viewed positively in a wide variety of domains, there seems to be almost no dissent over whether or not it is fundamentally a good idea, whatever is meant by it. Colley's analytical approach to mentoring as a practice, as well as to the rhetoric that surrounds it, is noteworthy. She notes that the concept's seemingly universal acceptance is matched by equally universal vagueness about its origins and what it means. Here, she emphasizes the centrality of the *Odyssey* to this problem:

[The] complexity [of mentoring dyads] may be illustrated by analyzing one of the most powerful images that has been used to promote the mentoring movement: the myth of Mentor. ... [T]his myth appears repeatedly in academic articles, practitioner journals, and in publicity and training materials for mentoring programs. It is used to claim that mentoring is a practice dating back thousands of years, and this is typical of the way in which myths often serve to legitimate certain practices.<sup>23</sup>

HBE's book illustrates her point well by telling us,

In Homer's timeless tale of Odysseus, Mentor was a faithful friend into whose care the world-wandering hero entrusted his son, Telemachus. Mentor's job was to guide the

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<sup>23</sup> Spelling in this citation is adjusted from standard British to American usage.

prince's development while his father was fighting in the Trojan War. Telemachus would be the future ruler of the kingdom; it was important that he be prepared. (76)<sup>24</sup>

This image of Telemachus the future ruler, in contrast to one of Telemachus the child, demonstrates well the difference between a view of mentoring that seeks to serve the individual for his own sake--which Buckley and Zimmerman seem to advocate--and an approach to mentoring, suggested by the HBE authors, that says an individual ought to be mentored only inasmuch as his present future social or professional function might justify it.

While this variety of interpretations of the epic and the word do not simplify the task of pinning down a meaning, they demonstrate the many nuances that *mentoring* may imply. Questions raised in these readings to which we shall periodically return include why a relationship began, whose goals are at stake, who sought out whom, and whether or not a powerful third party is involved. We shall also consider if the guidance occurs primarily to benefit the protégée or to further a particular agenda of an interested party.

#### Fénélon's *Télémaque*: a Seventeenth-century French Tale of Mentor and Telemachus

Twentieth-century authors were by no means the first to appropriate Homer's myth to express their ideas about guidance and education. One of the most prominent versions of the story came from France at the dawn of the eighteenth century. Marivaux mocked it in his text *Télémaque travesti*. As it therefore represents an intersection of the founding *mentoring* literature and the world of the texts featured in this study, let us consider how Fénélon's *Les Aventures de Télémaque* (1699) recounts the story of Telemachus.

The narrative begins with the young hero and his guide marooned on the island of the nymph Calypso. Throughout the tale, Athena keeps her identity secret from her charge; she

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<sup>24</sup> We might note the absence of Athena from this and other explanations.

reveals herself only on the shores of Ithaca just before Telemachus goes to join his father. As the title suggests, this story is concerned solely with the young man. This is true to the extent that none of the drama at all takes place in Ithaca, nor on Mount Olympus. Neither Odysseus nor Penelope has a speaking role. Athena's only disguise is that of Mentor, which she keeps from start to finish in the tale. It seems, in fact, that the true hero of this work is Athena-as-Mentor, for it is she who is quoted at great length, including in passages totally unrelated to the young man's adventures. For example, in an episode in which Telemachus and Mentor are hosted by King Idoménée, Telemachus is engaged in fighting a war for his host, and several pages are devoted to Mentor's efforts at reforming the kingdom (191-94). Thus we see the work's quality of "oeuvre pédagogique," noted by Jacques le Brun in his introduction (ix), as distinct from the epic adventure upon which it is based. The narrator specifies the reason for all the reforms in the kingdom:

Minerve<sup>25</sup>, sous la figure de Mentor, établissait ainsi dans Salente toutes les meilleures lois et les plus utiles maxims de gouvernement, moins pour faire fleurir le royaume d'Idoménée que pour montrer à Télémaque, quand il reviendrait, un exemple sensible de ce qu'un sage gouvernement peut faire pour rendre les peuples heureux.... (194)

Several aspects of this statement are noteworthy in its implications for the meaning of *mentoring*. First, it is definitely an elitist model:<sup>26</sup> the education of the prince is of such primordial importance that Athena will change ways of life in an entire kingdom, not so much for the good of those who live there as so that Telemachus, leader-in-training, might see a good example. Also, whereas Homer's myriad disguises for Athena show helpers and guides who are male and female, young and old, powerful and vulnerable, Fénélon chooses to locate authority and wisdom exclusively in the form of a respected male elder in the community. The seventeenth-century French text suggests that guidance comes only from

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<sup>25</sup> Fénélon uses the Roman name *Minerva* rather than the Greek *Athena* for the goddess.

<sup>26</sup> Given the period, it should not come as a surprise that Fénélon offers an elitist model of mentoring.



such a source, while in the *Odyssey*, the powerful often depend in critical moments upon the young, the powerless, and the female.

In addition, *Les Aventures de Télémaque* firmly suggests that teaching the young man how he will fulfill his destiny, rather than trying to determine what it might be, is what matters. There is no question but that Telemachus's job is to become king; indeed, Athena-Mentor goes to great lengths to tear him away from the Island of Calypso when he falls in love with one of the nymphs there. This is not a model of mentoring that illustrates Wiltshire's ideal of "discernment of choices rather than self-advancement in choices already made" (2). Telemachus here has no choices to discern; rather, he has a destiny to fulfill. Fénelon's tale features a mentor as an agent who seeks to mold the charge to fit the job chosen for him.

#### The Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* as a Model of Female Mentoring

Having explored some ways in which the *Odyssey* has influenced ideas about mentoring, let us turn now to another literary offering from ancient Greece as a template for how people might guide one another through transitions. As Rollo May underscores in *The Cry for Myth*, "Myths are narrative patterns that give significance to our existence" (15). Through stories that describe our fears, struggles, and joys, we are able to order them, to tame them, in a sense. The importance of "threshold figures" (Felson-Rubin 89) is demonstrated in the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter*, circa sixth century B.C.E.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> We know of several recorded versions of the tale; Helene Foley provides a list in her book (30-31). The text of the hymn comes from one heavily damaged manuscript, dated early fifteenth century A. D., which was discovered in a Moscow stable in 1777 (Foley 31).

The poem recounts the abduction of Persephone to the underworld, her mother Demeter's anger and search for her, and concludes with a compromise consisting of Persephone's spending part of the year above the Earth and part of the year in the Underworld. In contrast to the *Odyssey*, the action of the *Hymn to Demeter* centers on the parent seeking her child, rather than vice versa. As Tamara Agha-Jaffar emphasizes in *Demeter and Persephone: Lessons from a Myth*, the mentoring that occurs in the story is collective, with several women and goddesses helping Demeter on her journey, rather than only one. Also, the fact that Demeter is a goddess and yet it is she who needs to be guided and accompanied, sometimes even by mortals, suggests that help does not always come from the top down. We may therefore consider the *Hymn to Demeter* as a companion myth to the *Odyssey*, another poem composed in ancient Greece that testifies to the importance of guides and companions in times of transition.<sup>28</sup>

The poem begins when Persephone (Kore prior to her abduction) is seized and taken to the underworld by its king, Hades. Grief-stricken and enraged, Demeter begins a quest to find and free her daughter. For nine days, she searches in vain, neither eating nor bathing. A friend and sister then comes to accompany her: "But when the tenth Dawn came shining on her, Hekate met her, holding a torch in her hands, to give her a message" (51-53).<sup>29</sup> Together, the two then go to Mount Olympus and ask Helios, god of the sun who sees everything, for information. Much as Athena offered companionship to Telemachus as he faced the unknown in his quest to learn news of his father, Hekate joins Demeter as she faces

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<sup>28</sup> I am deeply grateful for Tamara Agha-Jaffar's *Demeter and Persephone: Lessons from a Myth* and in particular for Chapter 5 of that book, "Female Mentoring," in which her analysis called to my attention the many ways in which female mortals and other goddesses function as mentors to Demeter in her search for Persephone.

<sup>29</sup> This and all citations of the *Hymn to Demeter* are from the translation by Helene P. Foley from *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter: Translation, Commentary, and Interpretive Essays*, Princeton U Press, 1994.

the uncertain prospect of seeking news of her daughter. As Agha-Jaffar observes, Hekate, goddess of transitions, is the one who “guides us as we move from one stage of our lives to the next.... [S]he does not abandon Demeter to fend for herself.... She accompanies [her] on her fact-finding mission to provide moral and emotional support” (76-77). Here companionship on a difficult journey is a kind of mentoring.

Helios tells the distressed mother what happened and tries to persuade her to abandon her anger and grief. Demeter abandons neither, but, as Agha-Jaffar suggests, seems still to lack the strength to confront Zeus head-on. Rather, she leaves Mount Olympus in sorrow and takes the form of an old woman, going to the city-state of Eleusis to “where citizens drew water from the Maiden’s Well,” (*HD* 99) where she encounters the four daughters of the mortal Metaneira. Agha-Jaffar suggests that knowing that collecting water was a task typically done by women, Demeter deliberately sought solace from other women by going to this spot. Like the shipwrecked Odysseus washing up on the Phaeacian shore, Demeter is a powerful being in a moment of needing shelter and welcome. The four young girls arrange for the goddess to work in their home as a nursemaid to their baby brother Domophoon. Their mother Metaneira offers unconditional hospitality, in much the same way that Telemachus does for the disguised Athena and Nausicaa does for Odysseus: “But now you have come here, all that’s mine is yours” (218). As the hospitality permits those journeys to continue, we may see it as another way to mentor.

Along with the invitation comes the assignment of work that the goddess will do in exchange for this shelter: “Raise this child for me...” (219). Agha-Jaffar refers to Bettina Aptheker’s *Tapestries of Life* in proposing that Demeter took the humble form of an old woman needing shelter and work so that she might, through the performance of repetitive,

daily tasks, order life around her in a way that would help her process and order her grief. If we accept that interpretation, then Metaneira's assigning of work is as much a gift as is the offer of shelter. Like Athena, this mortal offers the gift of responsibility, the needs of a newborn child to tend--surely not a role that can be filled by one who is totally consumed by her own grief. Metaneira asks Demeter to make a psychological transition from inconsolable sadness to caring for another. By asking something of her, she urges her onward, to a new phase of her life. By doing so, she engages in mentoring the goddess.

Wishing to make the infant immortal, the goddess nightly puts him in a fire. His mother sees her doing so and cries out for her child. In anger, the goddess throws the child on the floor, takes on her true form as Demeter, and rebukes the mother for her foolishness and that of mortals in general. She declares that in compensation for having offended her, the people of Eleusis must build a temple in her honor. Sitting in her temple, she imposes famine on the earth, depriving Zeus of the offerings that he so prizes. He bids Hades release the young girl. Hades consents.

Before leaving the underworld, however, Persephone tastes a pomegranate, an act that will destine her to return there for one third of every year thereafter. She joins her mother in a joyful reunion, and they are joined by Hekate, who again offers companionship and accompaniment at a time of transition. The encounter between mother and daughter shows mentoring in the direction in which we might expect it, from the older to the younger, in contrast with much of the story. Demeter immediately senses that something is wrong and asks her daughter if she ate anything while in the Underworld. Persephone acknowledges eating the pomegranate. Demeter accepts the fact that her daughter will always leave her for a time to return to the Underworld, and she then continues to rejoice in their time together.

By accepting this new reality, Demeter recognizes her daughter's transition to adulthood. In so doing, she inaugurates a relationship that is closer to friendship than to a parent-child dynamic. This is a kind of mentoring, for she graciously helps Persephone make an important transition. As Agha-Jaffar observes, "Demeter may have lost her little girl, but she has apparently gained a friend, a soul mate, and a sister" (55). Once this reunion is achieved, Rheia, mother of Demeter and Zeus, persuades Demeter to abandon her anger and once again allow the earth to bring forth bounty.

Agha-Jaffar reflects on the demonstration of mentoring in this tale:

One of the most salient features of the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* is female mentoring. Each of the females who appears in the poem plays a pivotal role in varying degrees to propel the story forward and bring it to suitable closure.... [T]he *motus operandi* of these females is collaborative, supportive, and empathetic.... These women engage in female mentoring. (73)

Helene Foley emphasizes the importance of the Demeter/ Persephone myth to ancient Greek women in her book, noting that in the celebration of the rites of Demeter, women played the "central or exclusive role" (72). She observes:

...[F]estivals of Demeter offered women a time to join with other women in celebrating myths concerning social transitions from childhood to marriage and motherhood. They were permitted an exceptional autonomy--to act, speak, eat, and drink in ways not permitted to them in ordinary life. They left home and family for rites they themselves presided over.... (74-75)

While the word *mentor* does not appear in this tale, its chronological and cultural proximity to the *Odyssey* permits reading it as a companion text to the epic. In both the *Odyssey* and the *Hymn to Demeter*, the vulnerable traveler is one of great stature and power--Odysseus the hero king and Demeter, goddess of the harvest.<sup>30</sup> Yet each of them comes to a situation of need in which young girls--Nausicaa and Metaneira's daughters--are able to provide critical assistance, and that assistance makes it possible for their journeys to

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<sup>30</sup> The ideas of reciprocity in mentoring and the importance of Odysseus's and Demeter's vulnerabilities are important themes in the work of Wiltshire, Agha-Jaffar, and Foley.

continue. It also provides useful models of female mentoring that complement the images of the practice seen in Homer's epic because of the central role that women play in the *Hymn* and the importance of the rites of Demeter to women in ancient Greek culture.

### A Working Definition

In light of the many ambiguities surrounding the term and its uses, I propose a definition of *mentoring* comprised of three characteristics found in every context, including in the *Odyssey* and the *Hymn to Demeter*. First, the mentor serves as a guide. Second, she is able to do so because she has some wisdom or experience from which the other can benefit. Thirdly, although the relationship may continue in a different form, like a friendship, the specific practice of mentoring is a temporary one. The mentor guides the protégée through a particular period of transition, offering wisdom and guidance for the other.

### Possibilities in Mentoring Relationships

Let us now consider some of the questions surrounding the relationships to be explored while discussing the French fiction and drama in this study. Contemporary discussions of mentoring and the Homeric poems suggest that within the notion lie certain key elements that vary and that determine what kind of relationship is in question. The table below suggests some key questions concerning the initiation and structure in mentoring relationships.

Table 3.1: Structural Possibilities

What is the primary question the protégé is asking?	A) Who am I? B) What will I do? C) How will I do it?
What is the mentoring structure?	A) Network of many several mentors B) One mentor
Why does the relationship exist?	A) Informally initiated by protégé B) Informally initiated by mentor C) Assigned by a third party
Does the relationship have specific goals?	A) Yes B) No
Who sets the goals?	A) Protégé B) Mentor C) Third party

In addition to posing these questions of how mentoring relationships are structured, we shall consider what power dynamics exist within them or may evolve, and to what extent there is the possibility of the protégée offering something to the mentor.

An eventuality that is not an issue in the *Odyssey* between Telemachus and his guide, as she is a goddess and he a mere mortal, yet one that appears often in literature on mentoring in the workplace, is that of competition. Often those able to help others succeed are in fields very similar to those of their charges. J. Scutt, editor of *Living Generously*, writes of the potential for competition as a specifically masculine phenomenon:

Powerful *old* men are inevitably eclipsed, eventually by powerful *young* (or younger) men. And not liking it... they strike back.... Invariably it is directed against those who threaten them most: the very men they have mentored. (13)

She then goes on to contrast that pattern with female mentoring, which she describes as collective, reciprocal, and non-competitive. While many like Scutt and Agha-Jaffar claim that female mentoring is supportive by nature, the idea of competition in the relationship was raised by nearly all the women interviewed in Jane Adams's *Women on Top* (1979). The

study explores routes to success for businesswomen, and one of the means was mentoring.

One stated,

“In the mentor relationship, women are very competitive. While they want you to succeed, it’s only up to a certain point. With so few women near the top, you are readily identifiable as a threat, because chances are only one of you will make it.” (89)

As discussed earlier, Colley evokes the possibility of a third party that exerts power over individuals in the relationship. Her study *Mentoring for Social Inclusion: a critical approach to nurturing mentor relationships* examines a mentoring program in England aimed at young people who are engaged neither in education nor in paid work. The program offers participants low-paying, low-skilled jobs and pairs them with mentors whose job is to encourage their charges to embrace one of the half dozen or so options proposed by the program. Colley’s interviews with participants and mentors led her to the conclusion that such a program carries out the agendas of employers, by providing them with willing workers, and of the government, by reducing the need for government funding for social programs, because mentoring tends to be done by volunteers. Thus, the motivation for mentoring has little to do with the interests of the protégés and much more to do with the interests of third parties sponsoring the relationship. This is a possibility that we shall explore in particular when discussing Marivaux’s *La double inconstance* and the dynamics among the prince, Flaminia, and Sylvia.

Colley also addresses the issue of class as it functions in situations such as the mentoring program that she studied, in which middle class college students are assigned to young people who are disengaged from the education system and from the labor market. Indeed, in many structured mentoring programs aimed at young people, there is a class difference between the charges and those there to guide them: the helpers are higher on the social ladder. Work situations, on the other hand, tend to involve social equals. Ancien



Régime France, with its practice of entrusting the education of young aristocrats to their governesses, offers a third scenario: a class difference in which the guide is the social subordinate of her charge.<sup>31</sup> This is evident in Orphise's reply to Cénie in response to the young girl's plea, "Daignez me protéger, me conduire, me tenir lieu de mère; et que mes services effacent la honte de ceux que vous m'avez rendus." Indignant, Orphise replies, "Vous, me servir, Cénie! Gardez-vous bien de perdre l'estime de vous-même" (IV.1). Marivaux's *La double inconstance* presents another variation on class dynamics, as Flaminia, one of the prince's servants, takes it upon herself to influence the peasant girl, Sylvia, whom the prince has brought into the castle in hopes of wooing and marrying her.

Another question concerns what happens at the end of the mentoring period. The fact that the relationship, in its form of one person serving as a guide to the other, is temporary, is one of the three elements typifying mentoring relationships included in my definition. What happens when the transition period, for which the guidance was needed, ends? These questions and some eventualities are posed in the table below.

Table 3.2: Power and Balance

If the relationship is assigned by a third party, over whom does that party have power?	A) Protégé B) Mentor C) Both D) Neither
Does the mentor have direct power over the protégé?	A) Yes B) No
Does the protégé ever have or gain control over the mentor? <sup>32</sup>	A) Yes B) No
Is there reciprocity in the relationship?	A) Yes B) No
What happens when the mentoring relationship ends?	A) Protégé and former mentor compete B) The two becomes friends/ allies C) Contact ceases

<sup>31</sup> Fénelon bemoans the practice of entrusting young girls' education to their governesses for this reason.

<sup>32</sup> I thank Dr. Carol Sherman, whose wording this is, for drawing my attention to this possibility.

Is there a class difference between the mentor and the protégé?	A) Yes B) No
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### A Framework for Discussion of Literary Texts

In discussing the six texts in questions, we shall focus on relationships of guidance and mentoring between women in my analysis. As seen in this chapter, such relationships may be initiated in a number of ways, may or may not involve a third party, and a variety of dynamics may evolve. Wiltshire writes that mentoring “has to do with the company we keep, some of it quite unexpected and perhaps short-lived”(2). This suggests that mentoring may occur in a large variety of situations and ways--that it may occur as part of a sustained interaction or in an only brief encounter. With that perspective, we shall approach mentoring in these works of literature as a phenomenon that that may appear in surprising ways, like in Nausicaa’s clever advice to Odysseus about how to reach her parents’ palace and seek shelter there. While discussing the works, we shall consider the questions raised here, as well as the possible roles that the mentor and the protégé might play. We shall discuss ways in which these works of seventeenth-century and eighteenth-century French fiction reflect and differ from the models of mentoring found in the *Odyssey* and the *Hymn to Demeter* and shall integrate these ancient tales of mentoring and guidance into the discussions of *Célinde*, *Mathilde*, *La double inconstance*, *La mère confidante*, *Lettres d’une Péruvienne*, and *Cénie*.

Chapter 4  
In Hekate's Footsteps:  
Female Mentoring in Madeleine de Scudéry's First Two Novellas

Introduction

Madeleine de Scudéry (1607-1703) was one of the most prominent and popular novelists and salon hostesses of the seventeenth century. Her multi-volume novels include *Artamène ou le Grand Cyrus* (1649-1653) and *Clélie, histoire romaine* (1654-1660), featuring the famous Carte de Tendre. The publication of *Célinde* in 1661 marked a shift toward shorter-format novellas in the author's fiction. Her writing career in later years included various editions of *conversations* (1682, 1683, 1685, 1685). She remained a highly visible *femme de lettres* throughout the mid and late-seventeenth century and is frequently associated with *préciosité*, a term from which she and others distanced themselves after the premiere of Molière's *Les précieuses ridicules* (1659). Scudéry sought to dignify relations between the sexes through refined conversation and the promotion of women's learning; she was also known to express sentiments against marriage as generally oppressive to women. Her salon, the *samedis*, held at her home on the rue de Beauce in the Marais (Denis and Spica 21), was an important center of literary and intellectual encounters.

The themes and textural structure of Scudéry's first novellas were in many ways similar to those of the long novels that preceded them. Each of these tales presents a sympathetic young heroine as she is entering adulthood and making the decisions that will determine what the rest of her life is like. Both of these texts as well as the *Promenade à Versailles* begin

with a lengthy prologue that establishes the novella's tone, lauds certain values, and situates the characters' social class. The prologues feature gatherings of friends--both men and women--walking and conversing in an idealized setting. As Marie-Odile Sweetser notes, the reader may observe that very different opinions are exchanged with politeness and courtesy ("De l'Idéal galant à l'héroïsme amoureux," 136).<sup>33</sup> Both sexes participate equally in the discussion, expressing opinions and responding to others. Sweetser observes,

"...la romancière ramène... ses lecteurs au thème du prologue, après avoir illustré... l'idéal gallant<sup>34</sup> dans la pratique mondaine de la conversation et dans les rapports harmonieux existant dans un cercle d'amis où chacun respecte la liberté d'opinion et d'expression de l'autre." (136)

The fact that the group has the leisure to spend the day enjoying a walk and a pleasant conversation clearly places them in the most privileged social class. The narrator seems to confirm the rightness of the class system by portraying those with money as also having good manners and good taste. Perhaps most importantly for this discussion, the author weaves women's intellectual equality with men into the text as a given. The presentation of these social gatherings in the novellas' prologues creates a link among the author, the characters, and the reader and gives to the stories a certain didactic quality. Scudéry's stories contain neither the satire that will be found in Marivaux's work nor the social criticism later presented by Graffigny. These assemblies centered on literature and lively conversation based on mutual respect represent the social model that the author lived, through the salons hosted by her and others in her social circle, and that her writing promotes.

The portrayal of such gatherings places Scudéry's works in the tradition of Marguerite de Navarre's *L'Heptaméron* (1559), a tale depicting a group of five men and five

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<sup>33</sup> Sweetser's study appears in the volume edited by Delphine Denis and Anne-Elisabeth Spica, *Madeline de Scudéry: Une femme de lettres au XVIIe siècle*, Artois: Artois Presses Université, 2002.

<sup>34</sup> The "idéal gallant" emphasized courteous manners between the sexes, artful conversation, and, as Sweetser notes, respect for others' opinions.

women on a journey fleeing a flood who take turns telling stories as they travel. The party also determines that, at the end of each day, the storyteller will select the next person to narrate.<sup>35</sup> As observed by Gisèle Mathieu-Castellani,<sup>36</sup> the tellers alternate between the sexes,

indice de cette ‘égalité’ que les personnages acceptent de reconnaître le temps d’un jeu: ‘récit de femme’ et ‘récit d’homme’ se succèdent régulièrement, la Narratrice accordant à chaque sexe le droit d’élire un point de vue particulier. (32)

Mathieu-Castellani also notes that the telling of stories is presented not merely as entertainment but also as possessing a “vertu thérapeutique” (24-25). This combination of utility and amusement as twin goals of the text, along with the themes of mutual respect and equality in intellectual exchange between the sexes, exemplify the humanistic tradition in which Navarre’s text and Scudéry’s tales are both inscribed.

In Scudéry’s novellas, we see female mentoring both in the action and in the portrayal of salons resulting from female initiative.<sup>37</sup> As established women entertained in their homes or directed conversation on an outing to the country, they provided for younger women models to imitate and a space in which to gain confidence as they constructed their social identities.

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<sup>35</sup> Gisèle Mathieu-Castellani, who provides the introduction and notes for an edition of *L’Heptaméron* published by the Librairie Générale Française in 1999, specifies that this practice is part of the tradition of oral tales and gives as an example the Corsican formula for the transition from one speaker to the next: “*Fola foletta/ Mett’in calzetta/ Ditte a vostra/ A mea è detta* (Fable/récit oral/ petite fable/ Mettez- là (spelling cited in the text) dans la chaussette/ Dites la vôtre/ La mienne est dite)” (21).

<sup>36</sup> Mathieu-Castellani introduces and annotates the Librairie Générale Française’s edition of the text published in 1999.

<sup>37</sup> Wendy Gibson uses the term *mentoring* to describe the function of salons for the young men in Parisian literary circles at the time. The young men certainly had access to more formal education than their hostesses had, but those women offered the stability of a space in which to gather as well as the ability to smooth the often-rough manners of young men who had perhaps spent very little time with the opposite sex (*Women in Seventeenth-Century France*).

## Female Mentoring in *Célinte*

### Story

The heroine, Célinte, is a rich young woman orphaned early in life who lives with a female relative slightly older than she, Lysiane. Célinte's contact with Lysiane's friends integrates her into their social group. Two of the young men in the group declare their love for Célinte, to no avail. She later meets an acquaintance of her brother, Poliante, and the two quickly develop a mutual affection. Meanwhile, one of the frustrated suitors, Méliandre, has become a favorite of the prince and jealously plots against Poliante. The persecuted hero and the heroine marry, but as they are leaving the church, Poliante is arrested on false charges, and it soon becomes clear that he will be sentenced to death for treason. To save him, the heroine feigns her own death, convincing all, including her husband, and goes into exile. She does this with the help of a trusted friend, Mélise, who then sends the young woman to a convent and to the protection of another ally, head abbess Clarinte. A rumor leads the heroine to believe that her husband has died, and her despair doubles. Various events occur during this time. Poliante searches for his wife's remains, Célinte mourns for him, Clarinte saves the heroine from her suicidal wishes and from other threats. War finally reunites the couple since Poliante fights valiantly on the king's behalf and is led to the castle to be honored just as Célinte also is taken there by force. The story concludes quickly thereafter.

### Mentors

Who are the mentors and how do their actions in the story affect the heroine?

There are three women in the novella who act as mentors to Célinte: Lysiane, the relative with whom she lives after her parents' deaths, Méliše, the friend and confidante who shelters the young woman in her initial disappearance from society, and finally Clarinte, the head abbess at the convent where Célinte stays for six years. The tables and discussions that follow detail the manners in which each of the three supports and protects the heroine. To facilitate a rapid and schematic reading of the functions of all three mentors in relation to the heroine, the characters are designated in the tables as follows: Célinte, the heroine, is designated as *H*, Lysiane, the first mentor, as *M1*, Méliše, the second mentor, as *M2*, and Clarinte, the third mentor, as *M3*.

Table 4.1:  
Functions of Lysiane (M1) in Mentoring Célinte (H)

Pages	Development in Célinte (H) and Lysiane's (M1) relationship	Result of M1's influence for H
65-66	After her parents' deaths, H lives with Lysiane (M1).	H becomes integrated into M1's social network.
73-75; 89	M1 acts as hostess on several occasions, including for Poliante's first visit.	H gains independence and confidence. M1 acts as a door-opener.

Lysiane's role is not central to the story; she disappears from the text once Poliante gets into trouble. She nevertheless performs important functions in the heroine's social education. This mentor offers shelter and protects her young relative's reputation while allowing her to interact with a lively group of friends, fulfilling the functions of door-opener

and hospitality-giver. It is in Lysiane's home that the heroine moves from a dependent, orphaned girl to an independent young woman with the courage to propose her daring plan to Mélise. The two young women entertain guests of both genders, gatherings much like the *ruelles* or salons that Scudéry both hosted and attended: "...[L]a jeune Célinte attira[i]t beaucoup de monde chez Lysiane, qui de son costé avoit beaucoup d'Amis" (66).<sup>38</sup> As hostess and example, Lysiane serves as a threshold figure for Célinte. The heroine has the opportunity to interact with people of both sexes in a situation that does not compromise her honor, yet offers more freedom and autonomy than she would likely have in a parental home. A young widow, Lysiane is the age to be a big sister to Célinte, and the arrangement provides a kind of social apprenticeship.<sup>39</sup>

Table 4.2: Functions of Mélise (M2) Mentoring Célinte (H)

Pages	Development in Célinte (H) and Mélise's (M2) relationship	Result of M2's influence for H
112-115	M2 comforts H, questions the plan to save Poliante, and finally agrees to it.	H has a caring, devoted ally. She must clearly articulate her priorities. She receives hospitality.
115-116	H goes to M2's country home and then to a convent where M3 (Clarinte) is head abbess.	H gains agency and a new mentor/protector.
117	A letter from M2 relays that the plan has succeeded.	H gains valuable insider information from M2, although they are apart.
118	M2 dies.	H feels very isolated. <sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> The edition of *Célinte* used was published by Editions A-G. Nizet, Paris, in 1979. That edition retains Scudéry's spelling and usage. Each citation in this study replicates that of Scudéry for that particular passage.

<sup>39</sup> The dynamic of a mentor who provides an example and a network that nourishes a friend's social skills is also present in Graffigny's *Lettres d'une Péruvienne*.

<sup>40</sup> Suzanne Toczyski notes the heroine's isolation following Mélise's death in "Performing Secrets in Madeleine de Scudéry's *Célinte*" (188-189).



When Mélise is introduced into the story, things are going very badly for the heroine. Poliante is in prison and seemingly facing certain death, because of the hatred and jealousy of Méliandre, one of the suitors Célinte rejected. A pathetic scene in the prison depicts the couple seeing each other for what they assume will be the last time. The narrator concludes the meeting with the mournful details,

Poliante soupira, Célinte versa des larmes, & ils ne se purent parler que des yeux dans le dernier instant de cette dure separation, tant la douleur s'empara de leurs ames. Poliante demeura dans une chamber obscure, dont les murailles estoient fort épaisses & les fenestres grillées.... (112)

Immediately after these pitiable images, we read, "Célinte s'en alla retrouver la plus chere des ses amies, chez qui elle logeoit, cette Dame qui se nommoit Mélise..." (112). The introduction of the mentor just after Célinte's moment of extreme distress makes clear that the young woman goes very intentionally to her friend in a moment of need, emphasizing the strength of the emotional tie between them.

Once the young woman arrives, Mélise initiates a private conversation with her when she sees her sadness, much as Athena presented herself and made herself available to Telemachus. "...Mélise luy vit sur le visage une pasleur mortelle qui l'effraya & qui l'obligea à l'entretenir en particulier" (112).

Célinte will not quietly accept her husband's death. She proposes her plan to Mélise -to disappear and make all in the kingdom believe she has died. She extracts a promise of solidarity before revealing her idea: "Cependant devant que je vous die ce que c'est, il faut que vous me promettiez de me servir comme je veux estre servie" (113).

When the mentor first hears the plan, she poses a variety of objections and questions, so that Célinte must clearly articulate her own thoughts. For example, within the circle of the

prince's close allies, those persecuting Poliante because of his marriage to Célinte, is a woman named Artesie who is interested in Poliante herself. A likely outcome of the heroine's successfully-feigned death seems to be that the hero might be persuaded or forced to marry Artesie. When the young woman raises this possibility, her friend responds, "Mais pensez-vous que Poliante le veuille! (114)" The young woman must therefore affirm her commitment to the plan, despite the potential risks of its success. The process allows and requires her to clarify her own thoughts. This mentoring function--the posing of questions that requires the protégée to articulate priorities--is also present in Scudéry's second novella, in Mathilde's relationship with Lucinde. Whereas Mélise's questions in this scene serve to demonstrate that Célinte truly is committed to her plan, Lucinde's questions will force Mathilde to acknowledge affection for Alphonse that she had not yet recognized.

The plan involves the heroine's staying at her friend's country home overnight, seeming to fall ill, being declared dead by a doctor, and then being taken, in the company of an elderly male servant, to the convent on the edge of the kingdom where Clarinte, a relative of Mélise, is head abbess. It is successful. Mélise selflessly bids her friend farewell, after having provided her with the next mentor and protector. All believe Célinte to be dead, and because Poliante's persecutors were primarily motivated by trying to win his wife for Méliandre, they stop pursuing his death-sentence. Mélise writes to the heroine in the convent and tells her of their success, providing valuable information although she can no longer be a companion. She dies not long afterwards.

Table 4.3: Functions of Clarinte (M3) Mentoring Célinte (H)

Pages	Development in Célinte (H) and Clarinte's (M3) relationship	Result of M3's influence for H
117	The head abbess is presented sympathetically.	H has a potential new friend and mentor.
121; 124; 126-127	M3 opposes H's suicidal longings, inspires her recovery from a dangerous illness, and saves her from a poisonous snake.	M3 preserves H's life on three occasions.
121-124	The two discuss the morality of suicide.	M3 functions as a moral authority, but allows H to express herself.
124-127; 131-132; 148	M3 distracts and cheers H when they believe Poliante is dead and consoles her and sends help when Méliandre imprisons her.	H has a companion and friend, even when action is impossible.
127-129	M3 remains with H as Méliandre and his army approach, then confronts him to protect H.	H has a measure of protection. M3 attempts to preserve the feminized space, the place of refuge.
147	M3 proposes a plan to free H.	H witnesses M3 taking risks for her.

Clarinte is introduced as “une Fille de grande vertu & de grand esprit, que la perte d’une Personne qu’elle aimoit avoit jettée dans cette retraite” (117). This presentation emphasizes her subjective worth and suggests that having had an experience similar to Célinte’s will make her sympathetic to the young woman’s sadness. After the heroine hears a false rumor that Poliante has been killed, we read, “Durant les premiers jours de son desespoir, elle vouloit absolument mourir; & si la sage Clarinte ne se fust opposée à une si funeste resolution, elle se seroit donné la mort” (121). This first use of Clarinte’s name, a moment when we learn that she has preserved the heroine’s life by opposing her suicide, presents the theme of her saving Célinte.<sup>41</sup>

A lengthy discussion then occurs between the two concerning the morality of seeking one’s own death or directly causing it. The abbess declares both to be wrong, but

<sup>41</sup> The same pattern appears in Graffigny’s *Lettres d’une Péruvienne*: Céline repeatedly saves Zilia, including from suicidal wishes.

successfully acquires a promise from her charge not to harm herself only upon invoking the name of Poliante. Clarinte clearly functions as the moral authority here, calling Célinte “ma fille,” and being addressed as “ma Mère,” as was the custom in religious orders.

Nevertheless, there is true dialogue. The young woman questions much of what the abbess says, and the older woman responds to each objection in turn, genuinely trying to persuade the latter, rather than merely telling her what she must do.

Later, Célinte falls dangerously ill with fever due to her despair (124). The abbess’s resulting sadness inspires her to recover and live. Clarinte saves her charge for a second time, not through theoretical teaching but through the intensity of her personal affection for the young woman. When the heroine is sick, “...Clarinte en parut si triste, que cette belle affligée connut la grandeur de son mal, par la grandeur de l’affliction de son Amie... & elle en eut en effet tant de joye, que cette joye la guerit...” (124). Friendship rescues Célinte, much as love will save Alphonse from a similar illness in *Mathilde*.

For a time, the abbess is the heroine’s sole human contact, a kind of lifeblood preventing the young woman from spiraling into total isolation. We read that she “ne parloit presque qu’à Clarinte” (126) and “fuyait toutes les Vièges voiles, excepté Clarinte” (127). Through friendship with the abbess, Célinte maintains an emotional tie to another person. Without this connection, she might have become so distanced that she would not have been able to reconnect with Poliante when circumstances permitted their reunion. It seems quite possible that Clarinte constitutes a critical bridge that preserves the heroine’s capacity for closeness with another.

Finally, Célinte at one point allows a threatening snake to approach her within striking distance, avoiding death only when the abbess arrives on the scene, cries out, and

frightens the animal away (126-127). Clarinte saves the young woman from death for the third time, in a rather concrete manner on this occasion. The act places her in a position traditionally occupied in narratives by males. In this scene and in a later one when she confronts Célinte's threatening suitor, the abbess plays the role of the knight in medieval romances, defending a lady's life and liberty. The heroine, far from grateful, resents her protector for preventing an escape from life's pain (a reaction that Zilia also displays toward Céline in *Lettres d'une Péruvienne*).

Six years pass. It is wartime, and Méliandre, Célinte's frustrated suitor whose jealousy led him to persecute Poliandre unjustly, is leading the army in battle near the convent. Clarinte, concerned for her own safety and that of all her charges, wishes to lead them away from danger, but the heroine prefers to stay near the convent, where she believes Poliante's tomb to be. The abbess reluctantly remains:

... Clarinte ne la voulant pas abandoner, demeura dans sa Maison avec beaucoup d'inquietude, car elle jugeoit bien que si Méliandre sçavait qu'elle eust si long-temps cache Célinte, il en auroit l'esprit for irrité.... (128)

As this same man had the inclination and the ability to have Poliante put to death, the abbess is clearly taking tremendous personal risk in staying with Célinte. Her actions offer a variation on the *topos* of *whither-thou-goest*.<sup>42</sup> She confronts Méliandre and bravely pleads with him to leave the young woman to mourn in peace, but does not lie about Célinte's presence there "...car dans le désordre de la Guerre & en l'estast qu'estoit Méliandre, il n'y avoit point de Maisons de Vierges voiles où ne pust entrer" (129). The narrator's remark speaks volumes about the fragility of women in that place and time. The convent, meant to be a place of refuge wherein the abbess, not the king, held ultimate authority, is revealed as

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<sup>42</sup> I thank Dr. Carol Sherman for calling this theme to my attention during a discussion of loyalty of Graffigny's *Célie* in a graduate seminar.

vulnerable, capable of being violated by a male military officer favored by the crown. There was no guarantee of the sanctity of feminized space.

The abbess takes an active and risky step in solidarity with her protégée. Not only does she remain in the battle-threatened convent, but when the threat to the young woman's safety and peace appears, she faces him personally. Forced to allow Méliandre to enter, the abbess makes a final plea for a promise to leave the young woman alone, to which he replies, "Je ne promets rien... à qui ne me parle pas sincèrement" (130). The exchange emphasizes that the abbess has chosen solidarity with Célinte over honesty. Although she admitted to harboring a sad young woman, she claimed to know nothing about her.

Méliandre takes the heroine prisoner. "Clarinte faisoit ce qu'elle pouvoit pour la consoler, mais c'estoit inutilement" (132). Like Hekate accompanying Demeter to confront Zeus, Clarinte offers her continuing presence and comfort even when there is nothing more she can do.<sup>43</sup> Even after Célinte is in the custody of the royal guards, the abbess makes another attempt to free her. Much as the heroine imagined the scheme that brought her away from the central kingdom and out to the convent, via the help of an aged and loyal male servant of Poliante, Clarinte proposes a plan whereby Célinte can escape on horseback at night "sous la conduite d'un vieux Sacrificateur, chez une Soeur qu'il avoit" (147). The plan fails, however, just as she is about to ride away. The need of a trusted older man to secure safe passage through the countryside and of a woman at the other end to act as hostess, elements in both plans, reinforce the theme of vulnerability of women in this time and place.

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<sup>43</sup> The image of a mentor who offers comfort when she cannot change anything also appears in *Lettres d'une Péruvienne*. When Zilia grasps that the French social scale would likely place her at the bottom because she does not own anything, Céline does her best to console her.

### Conclusions: Female Mentoring in *Célinte*

Lysiane, Mélise, Clarinte all offer Célinte practical help and hospitality. Like Céline in Graffigny's *Lettres d'une Péruvienne*, Clarinte saves her young charge's life on several occasions. Shelter is a major contribution made by each mentor. The heroine is essentially on the run, seeking refuge, for much of the story, and alliances among women prove essential in protecting and preserving her. In both the *Odyssey* and the *Hymn to Demeter*, offerings of shelter, provisions, directions, and transportation are important gifts offered to travelers. A threshold figure may support a journey with a safe place to rest and gather strength just as surely as with the offering of counsel. Often, the safety and strength given are at once psychological and physical, so that the haven's function is double.

There is a network of mentors, including the named mentors who figure in the story in key ways--Mélise and Clarinte--as well as the waiting women and the anonymous nun who would have been the heroine's third hostess. The importance of this network of women to the plot and to the preservation of the heroine cannot be overstated. Célinte is finally reunited with Poliante, and the king ceases persecuting the hero, thanks to his bravery in battle, but neither of the young lovers would have lived to see that happy ending without the intervention of female mentors who helped the heroine save her husband and saw her through a series of dangerous passages.

Through the essential roles of practical and emotional support played by various women, Scudéry underscores the necessity of aid and support to young women vulnerable to a variety of threats. When Clarinte confronts Méliandre, her actions offer a particularly powerful portrait of the vulnerability of women in French society in the Ancien Régime and of the courage that they might need to protect one another. The image of an omnipotent,

unjust power structure looms large in this story as the heroine chooses to sacrifice her social identity and her marriage in an effort to save her husband's life. The events that follow, including Méliandre's forcing his way into the convent and capturing Célinte, underscore the fragility of feminized spaces. Although Clarinte is not able to stop him, her decision to remain with the heroine and to confront him underscores the importance of women as potential allies to each other in a dangerous and corrupt society in which the reach of the powerful knew no limits.

### Female Mentoring in *Mathilde*

#### Story

Scudéry's second novella, *Mathilde*, was published in 1667, a full six years after *Célinte*. As noted by Nathalie Grande, editor of the 2002 Honoré Champion edition of *Mathilde*, this period of inactivity stands in marked contrast with the author's previous rhythm of producing approximately one 1000-page volume of a novel per year (12). Surely not coincidentally, the period from 1661 to 1667 also marks the time that Scudéry's *tendre ami* Paul Pellisson spent in the Bastille. Personal secretary to the ill-fated Fouquet, Pellisson was imprisoned at the same time as his employer; Madeleine de Scudéry and Madame de Sevigné were both among those who wrote to the magistrates in favor of clemency for the two men. Grande also notes that the author removed the novella from store's bookshelves soon after its release, and it was not to return until 1702, after her death (12). The preface, "Les jeux servant de preface à Mathilde," seems the likely motivation for this decision; in it, the author not only dedicates the work to "Monsieur, le frère du roi," but also praises St. Cloud, home of the king's brother, to such an extent as to endanger the writer seriously for



her failure to praise the king and Versailles adequately (Grande 14). This story clearly bears the marks of the political climate in which it was composed. The themes of royal abuse of power, the vulnerability of all, especially women, in the face of that power, and the importance of networks of women to confront it, all appear prominently.

The novella opens with the story of the heroine's mother Constance and of the setting in the Castilian court.<sup>44</sup> She had been promised in marriage to the king of Castille, Alphonse XI, and was to have become queen.<sup>45</sup> The king broke his word, and she married a lord named Rudolphe who was out of favor with the court. She "...ne consentit qu'avec peine à ce mariage" and was "forcée à obéir..." (107).<sup>46</sup> The event is definitive for Constance; her disappointment becomes a critical element in Mathilde's formation. Forced to go into exile, the family moves to Avignon, where Mathilde's education is described.

In Avignon, thanks to the deliberate efforts of her mother, Mathilde spends time with Laure and Pétrarque and the lively and well-educated group surrounding them. Mathilde and Laure become close friends as the heroine grows from a child to an adolescent. The heroine learns rapidly at her new friend's side and participates in the conversations and promenades with the group. The idyllic time in Avignon ends on a serious note as Constance grows sick, suspects that her husband will want to return to Castille, and cautions her daughter never to marry the king who broke his word to her, should they indeed return. Mathilde agrees to

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<sup>44</sup> This structure, as Grande observes, is the same as that used by La Fayette to situate *La Princesse de Clèves* (1678) (31-32). Joan De Jean also proposes that Scudéry strongly influenced La Fayette's novel (*Tender Geographies* 84-85, 96, 100, 103, 115).

<sup>45</sup> The salic law, in force in France at this time, prevented women from ruling through birthright. Their only access to power thus came through marriage. Scudéry's insistence on the injustice done to Constance seems to evoke this reality.

<sup>46</sup> The spelling and usage for quotations from *Mathilde* reproduce those in Honoré Champion's 2002 edition of the text.

follow her mother's wishes and confides in Laure, who takes the advice a step further and advises her friend not to marry at all. Constance dies soon thereafter and Mathilde is "inconsolable" (113).

As Constance predicted, Rudolphe does wish to return to Castille. The king grants permission, on the condition that Mathilde stay near the court, either with the queen or with a female relative of the family. She obeys and is distraught to have to leave Laure. In Castille, the heroine stays at the home of her relative Théodore,<sup>47</sup> "qui était alors en considération à la cour" (134). The new hostess tells her charge about the court, including whom she might and might not trust. She recommends a young woman named Lucinde as very dependable.

Mathilde's father Rudolphe attempts to arrange a marriage for her with a young man named Alphonse, but neither wants to get married. Through the intermediary of Alphonse's friend, the two exchange letters and derail their fathers' plans. They subsequently meet, Alphonse regrets his categorical decision and declares undying love for the heroine. Mathilde does in fact have an "inclination" for him, but resists her feelings and his attentions. Soon after, her father dies, and the narrator declares that she is "en pleine possession de sa liberté"<sup>48</sup> (147). In addition to Alphonse, other suitors include the sinister prince Dom Pedro.

That combination of wills and sentiments constitutes the background for the events that follow. Alphonse falls gravely ill with despair at Mathilde's mistreatment of him. At Lucinde's urging, the heroine writes to him, and he recovers. Rumors circulate that Mathilde

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<sup>47</sup> We may note that this character's name was more commonly given to males; there was, however a female Sainte Théodore--no doubt Scudéry's source for the name.

<sup>48</sup> Grande clarifies in a footnote on this page that in fact Mathilde is fully independent only when there is no man in her family living who is responsible for her, and she refers readers to Jean Portemer's article, "Réflexions sur les pouvoirs de la femme selon le droit français au XVIIe siècle," cited in Chapter 3. Indeed, Mathilde will find her mother's father, her grandfather, in Castille, and his permission will be required for her to marry.

prefers Alphonse over her other suitors, and as a result, Dom Pedro starts a fire in an attempt to kill his rival and kidnap Mathilde. Alphonse thwarts the plan and rescues Mathilde. Not long after this violent event, the queen abruptly falls ill and dies, “*extrêmement regrettée particulièrement de Mathilde*” (215). The narrator’s comment shows that although the heroine had originally resisted living among the queen’s ladies, Mathilde does have affection for the female monarch. Scudéry may also be suggesting that the presence of a woman as ruler offered a degree of stability and protection that disappears with the queen’s death. Following her demise, the Moroccan army invades the Spanish coast, Alphonse is sent on the most dangerous missions, and not only survives but saves the kingdom. The king at first showers the hero with gratitude, but then is dismayed to learn that all that the young man really wants is Mathilde. As Constance predicted on her deathbed, the king does want to wed the heroine and make her queen. Mathilde refuses the crown, at last acknowledging that were she to wed anyone, it would be Alphonse. Alphonse has not, however, won his girl. The king’s jealousy leads him to imprison the hero, where the young man overhears a plot by Dom Pedro to free the prisoners and burn the palace. The king also places Mathilde under guard at Théodore’s home. After Alphonse saves the king’s life a second time by uncovering this plot, the monarch overcomes his own passion, releases Alphonse and Mathilde, and gives his blessing to their eventual marriage. They acquire an official permission to go to Avignon, where they stay permanently. With Laure and Pétrarque, they live blissfully in the Vaucluse.

## Mentors

There are four mentors in this story: the heroine's mother Constance, Laure, Théodore, the relative with whom she stays in Castille, and her friend Lucinde in Castille. The tables and discussions that follow detail how each of them functions in Mathilde's life. Characters are designated in the following manner: Mathilde (H), Constance (M1), Laure (M2), Théodore (M3), and Lucinde (M4).

Table 4.4: Functions of Constance (M1) Mentoring Mathilde (H)

Pages	Development in Mathilde's (H) and Constance's (M1) relationship	Result of M1's influence for H
106-107	M1 is promised to king; the king breaks his word. M1 marries out of obedience.	M1 will seek to restore a measure of justice through her daughter.
108-109	The family moves to Avignon. M1 cultivates friendship with M2's aunt.	Laure (M2) and H become friends.
117	M1 contradicts her husband concerning how H will treat a suitor. M1 asks H never to marry the king.	The mother-daughter alliance is strengthened in opposition to Rudolphe.
131	M1 dies.	H is "inconsolable"; M2 offers support.
204, 233, 235, 253, 255	The final counsel of M1 continues to serve as a touchstone for Mathilde.	After her death, the words of the mother are still strongly present in H's consciousness, motivating her response henceforth.

The text specifies two important things that Constance does that influence Mathilde. She cultivates a relationship with Laure's aunt, so that the two young girls become friends, and she asks her daughter not to marry the king who rejected her. The first decision defines the kind of education and influences the heroine will have and amounts to her mother's choosing her next mentor. In the latter action, Constance makes her daughter an ally against

the father; the narrator's verb choices clearly show the difference between the parents' power. The father "commanda à Mathilde" (117) to treat a particular suitor well, in hopes that a strategic marriage with a well-placed lord could win back the family's favor at the Castilian court, while the mother "la conjura" (117) in asking for solidarity. Constance's request that her daughter shun an eventual marriage to the king essentially marks the heroine's passage to adulthood. The heroine is no longer the child for whom her mother cares, but a collaborator in possession of power that the mother no longer has--not yet married, the young girl has the possibility of refusing a suitor. She asks her mother, in turn, to speak to her father and ease the situation. There is thus a partnership of mutual dependence, even though Mathilde has far more agency at this point than her mother does. Similarly, when Constance perceives that her husband wants to return to Castille and requests her daughter's help in preventing it, we see the trust and confidence that the mother has in Mathilde, as well as Constance's lack of power in relation to her husband.

When Constance dies, Laure and Pétrarque offer "mille marques d'amitié" (131) to Mathilde. This show of concern represents another link between the first two mentors in the heroine's life. It was Constance who brought her daughter to Laure, and at the moment of Constance's death, Laure plays an essential role of support for her friend.

After her death, Constance's words continue to echo in Mathilde's mind and determine her choices. For example, when the sinister prince Dom Pedro declares love for Mathilde, she responds that "une fille de Constance" would never trust the word of the son of Alphonse XIII (204). Similarly, when the heroine meets her grandfather, she first recounts their lives in exile and recalls her mother's final words (233). She again invokes her mother's words in refusing the king's proposal of marriage, first to her grandfather and then

to the king himself (253, 255). As Laure, the mentor to whom Constance entrusted her daughter's education, is still a dear friend at the close of the story, it is clear that the mother's two main actions endure long after her death.

Table 4.5: Functions of Laure (M2) Mentoring Mathilde (H)

Pages	Development in Mathilde's (H) and Laure's (M2) relationship	Result of M2's influence for H
108-111	M2 grows fond of H.	H acquires an education at M2's side.
114	H and M2 are friends.	The relationship has shifted from a quasi-parental one (111) to one of friendship.
118-119	M2 advises H against marriage, confirming H's own inclination.	H determines not to marry.
133-134	H must leave Avignon and Laure.	The sad separation emphasizes the intensity of the friendship.
140; 166	H resists pressure to marry from her father; M2 supports her.	M2 influences H from afar in writing.
272-273	H returns to Avignon and introduces Alphonse to M2.	H is M2's friend and equal.

The deliberate efforts of Constance to be near Laure and her aunt succeed, and Laure grows very fond of Mathilde. The heroine acquires an education that is linguistic and literary, as well as social. She learns Provençal and Italian, as well as the art of clever, gracious conversation. Avignon is portrayed as much more than a physical location--and is in fact presented as a whole socio-cultural model,<sup>49</sup> centered around the poet Pétrarque and Laure. Well-read and multi-lingual men and women, modest and virtuous, talented in music and arts, spend their days in lively conversation, promenades, and writing poetry.

Mathilde's education is as much social as literary. Laure praises her young friend's reserve with men and encourages her to continue thus. The heroine's resolve is thus

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<sup>49</sup> Delphine Denis and Anne-Elisabeth Spica, in their introduction to the volume *Madeline de Scudéry: Une femme de lettres au XVIIe siècle*, observe this aspect of Scudéry's work.

strengthened to make herself seem rather unapproachable. After several years of education at Laure's side, Mathilde has matured rapidly and by age 15, is her mentor's friend, no longer a child in whom Laure takes an interest. There is now an element of equality, although Laure is still the more experienced and the one who offers counsel to Mathilde, while the reverse does not occur. A conversation between the two immediately follows Constance's discourse to her daughter. Laure affirms her charge's inclination not only against an eventual marriage to Dom Fernand, but against marriage in general. The mentor here serves as the novelist's *porte-parole* of her general caution against marriage. Laure's advice will remain at the forefront of Mathilde's decision-making throughout the text, causing her to resist and deny her feelings for Alphonse even as they become apparent to others. The heroine will henceforth see her friend's life as a model for her own and seeks to cultivate a relationship shaped after that of Laure and Pétrarque. Because Laure's advice comes just after that of Constance and reinforces it, the connection between the two mentors is strengthened. Mathilde also gains confidence, because the ideas were originally hers, not Laure's. Following the heroine's expression of her own sentiments against marriage, her friend affirms these further by showing Mathilde verses written on that theme, and then "Laure donna encore une amie à Mathilde, qui la confirma dans les sentiments où elle était..." (120). Although the new friend, Bérengère, does not play a significant role in the text, her brief mention, like that of Laure's aunt, underscores Scudéry's vision of a whole network of women supporting each other morally and practically. The friendship is not isolated but nourished and strengthened by others, and like Constance who sought out Laure as a friend for her daughter, one of the gifts that Laure gives is another friend.

The passage describing the heroine's departure for Castille makes clear the intensity of the friendship and how much each has come to mean to the other. It is not merely a relationship of guidance and education for Mathilde. They have become dear friends, and Laure is as sad as her friend at the moment of their separation (133-134).

Just as Constance continues to exercise influence on her daughter after her death, Laure does not cease to have an impact on Mathilde once the two are physically separated. When the heroine's father informs her that he has chosen a husband for her, Laure's example gives Mathilde the courage to resist his plans (140). In a letter, Laure tells her friend, using the imperative, to recall their last conversations and not to forget the precious value of liberty (166). Though physically absent, Laure imposes herself with an explicitly authoritative tone, reinforcing the conversations that the two had in person.

When Mathilde returns to Avignon following her marriage, she turns to Laure "et la pria en souriant de lui pardonner s'il l'avait forcée à ne pas suivre ses conseils" (273). The heroine embarks upon a new stage of her relationship with her former mentor. She has not followed Laure's advice and seeks to cultivate a friendship based upon equality rather than on her friend's greater age and experience. The narrator offers an idealized description of the bliss shared by the foursome, stating how much they all loved one another, and that "ces quatre personnes ont fourni le modèle de la parfaite amour en deux manières différentes" (274). The two women successfully establish a new phase of their relationship, based on equality, and on Laure's acceptance of her friend's choices.



Table 4.6: Functions of Théodore (M3) Mentoring Mathilde (H)

Pages	Development in Mathilde's (H) and Théodore's (M3) relationship	Result of M3's influence for H
134	In Castille, H stays with her relative M3.	H is given shelter and hospitality.
135	At H's request, M3 provides information about the court and recommends Lucinde (M4).	H receives insider information and a potential new friend and mentor.
157-165	M3 hosts a salon-style gathering.	As she did in Avignon at Laure's side, H participates in lively social exchange.
261	H is confined in M3's home.	M3 does not protect H from the king.
270	M3 is disappointed H does not become queen.	H is saved from forced marriage not by her hostess but by the king's change of heart.

Théodore “avait de l'esprit et de l'ambition, et savait fort bien le monde” (134). This next influence on Mathilde's life is described in terms suggesting that the reader is not intended to empathize with her entirely, but that she might be useful to the young woman. Along with her hospitality, an alternative to living with the queen and her entourage, Théodore's other major contribution to the heroine's journey is her accurate description of the court, including her recommendation of Lucinde as one who could be trusted. The older woman provides her guest with insider information, as Métaneira's daughters did for Demeter and Nausicaa for Odysseus. Théodore directs Mathilde to Lucinde, reinforcing the theme of networks among women and that of a gift of one mentor being the selection of others.

While her initial advice is this mentor's most important contribution, she also plays a role performed by Laure, Lucinde, and other mentors in this study, that of social hostess. The only extended conversation in the novella<sup>50</sup> takes place in Théodore's apartment (157-

<sup>50</sup> As Grande notes, long conversations on themes such as love, sincerity, curiosity, or friendship were hallmarks of Scudéry's novels (157).

165). She provides a space in which men and women can interact as intellectual equals, hearing and responding to one another in the style of salons such as Scudéry's own *samedis*.

Théodore's role becomes problematic towards the end of the text. When the king decides that he wishes to marry Mathilde and is confronted with the fact that she does not reciprocate those desires, his solution is to hold the young woman by force, made possible through the tacit collaboration of Théodore. The concept of hospitality is perverted as she continues to host Mathilde, but cannot or does not protect her from the king's abuse of power (261). "Mais pour Mathilde, le roi la voyait tous les jours et lui <sup>51</sup> faisait parler continuellement par Théodore, qui était fort ambitieuse" (262). Although she provided valuable insider's knowledge that led to Mathilde's friendship with Lucinde, when the young woman's will conflicts with that of the king, Théodore seems to be no longer interested in promoting her charge's wishes, but rather ready to sacrifice her for an elevated position of the family.

When Mathilde and Alphonse marry, however, Théodore travels with the heroine to the wedding, thus playing the traditional role of accompanying another woman through a transition. The narrator tells us, "... Dom Manuel mena Mathilde à Lerma, accompagnée de sa chère Lucinde et de Théodore, qui était pourtant fâchée que sa parente ne fût pas reine" (270). This mentor's hospitality is vital for Mathilde, but her home also becomes a place of confinement. When the heroine marries Alphonse, Théodore makes the journey with her, while privately harboring regret and anger that the young woman chose her own happiness rather than the family's political advancement. Their dynamic demonstrates that serious disagreement between mentor and protégée can be part of a relationship that is nevertheless helpful and important.

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<sup>51</sup>This is the usage reproduced in Honoré Champion's edition published in 2002.

Table 4.7: Functions of Lucinde (M4) Mentoring Mathilde (H)

Pages	Development in Mathilde's (H) and Lucinde's (M4) relationship	Result of M4's influence for H
136-137	H chooses M4 as her new confidante.	The connection is made between H's friends in Avignon and in Castille.
140	The narrator relates that M4 is unhappy in her marriage.	H's resolve not to marry is strengthened.
151,195, 260	M4 is hostess for H to see Alphonse and in other social situations.	H benefits from an intermediary, a net-worker, and a chaperone.
152-153	M4 compares H's love for her with that for Laure (M2).	The language suggests that H has the emotional power in the relationship. Also, the relationship functions as a topic of discussion.
165; 170	M4 acts as Alphonse's advocate.	H gradually accepts Alphonse's affection.
166	H shares with M4 a letter from M2.	The theme of the network of women is reinforced.
199-205; 251	In trying moments, H and M4 convene, discuss, and determine what to do next.	M4 has become thoroughly implicated in H's life and shares her friend's concerns.
212; 221- 222	When external forces threaten to separate the two, both resist.	The tenderness and solidarity between the two women are emphasized.
234; 270	M4 accompanies H even when her actions cannot change circumstances.	H has a companion who remains with her, like Hekate, in difficult moments and transitions.
271	M4 is glad to see H leave for Avignon.	H receives a selfless and gracious farewell.

Soon after arriving at the Castilian court, Mathilde determines,

Lucinde fut... celle qu'elle crut qui pourrait avec le temps être la confidente de la douleur qu'elle avait de l'absence de son incomparable Laure; car elle ne comprenait pas en ce temps-là qu'elle pût jamais avoir d'autres secrets à confier. (136)

The connection is thus made between Mathilde's two friends, and the intensity of the emotional connection between Laure and her is emphasized in that longing for her friend in Avignon is presented as a secret for which she might need a confidante. The text proposes that friendships among women might not only serve as vehicles through which to discuss relationships with men but that they might also be the subjects of conversation.

Lucinde's example, like that of Laure, contributes to Mathilde's resolve to resist marriage. It is negative: "Lucinde ne se trouvait pas heureuse dans son mariage" (140).<sup>52</sup> Again, the narrator creates a link between the two different mentors: one who guides the heroine through an example that she wants to imitate and the other through an example that she wishes to avoid.

Like the mentors in *Célinte*, Lucinde often offers hospitality. It is in her apartment that Alphonse and Mathilde first meet after having refused the marriage to each other arranged by their fathers. In order to secure a private meeting, Lucinde must first evade the ill-intentioned Padille, who tries to follow her (151); this is an example of literally protecting the protégée from a situation that might tarnish the latter's reputation. Similarly, she again acts as hostess for the meeting between her friend and Alphonse when he returns from war (260). On that occasion, it is not only gossiping Padille that Lucinde must avoid, but also the prince Dom Pedro's soldiers. Like Méliandre in *Célinte*, Dom Pedro is both dangerous and powerful. Lucinde's choice to provide a space in which Mathilde and Alphonse can meet is therefore subversive and risky for her.

Like Mathilde's relationship with Laure and Célinte's bond with Clarinte, the tie between Lucinde and the heroine is also marked by intense dedication. In the first meeting between Mathilde and Alphonse, in Lucinde's apartment, the hostess warns the young man of the difficulty of entering into the heroine's affections:

...[Q]uand j'ai commencé à connaître Mathilde, elle ne me voulait ni estimer ni aimer. Elle n'avait le coeur rempli que d'une amie qu'elle a en Avignon.... Cependant, malgré son indifférence, et quoique je susse que la première place de son coeur était occupée par la personne du monde qui la mérite le mieux, je ne laissai pas de l'aimer plus que moi-même. (153)

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<sup>52</sup> In her article in *The Situational Mentor*, Ann Darwin addresses the phenomenon of those who say that they sometimes learn from negative examples in their work-place mentors, as well as positive ones (33; 36; 39).

The women's friendship appears in the forefront of the drama, rather than as a mere vehicle by which to negotiate relationships with men.

Lucinde acts as Alphonse's advocate throughout the story. The mentor teasingly questions the heroine about whether she is indeed sure that she will not love Alphonse (178). When Alphonse successfully makes Mathilde jealous, Lucinde questions her and forces her to articulate her feelings, much as Mélise does with Célinte when that heroine proposes her plan for exiting society. On another occasion, the hero falls ill, and Lucinde corresponds with him and persuades her friend to write to him as well, inspiring him to live (184-187). The mentor acts as intermediary and requires her friend to acknowledge her feelings honestly.

Lucinde also acts as her friend's ally in troubling situations, helping her to determine what to do and then accompanying her. When a poem written by Mathilde falls into the wrong hands, it creates a dangerous situation because the violent prince realizes that the heroine loves another. At the day's end, the two women convene: "Après cela, elles considérèrent ce qu'il y avait à faire..." (205). The language makes clear to what extent Lucinde has become implicated in her friend's life. Similarly, they together decode the cryptic words of Mathilde's grandfather regarding his intentions to marry her to someone in the royal family (251). Both situations underscore that the women negotiate each new obstacle cooperatively.

Several incidents emphasize the intense devotion between them. Each time that an external person or force attempts to separate the two friends, they resist.<sup>53</sup> Dom Pedro hires

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<sup>53</sup> Christine Roulston addresses the theme of female friendships as a potential threat to the male establishment in her article, "Separating the Inseparables: Female Friendship and Its Discontents in Eighteenth-Century France."

men to set fire to Lucinde's château and kidnap Mathilde, hoping to kill Alphonse and take the heroine by force. The voice that Alphonse hears in the tumult of the fire protests, "Mais où nous menez-vous? Nous ne voulons point quitter Lucinde" (212). When the novella evokes the theme of *enlèvement*,<sup>54</sup> the image of the solidarity between the women is reinforced by the fact that Mathilde does not want to leave her friend. On another occasion Théodore has to join a royal expedition, and Mathilde must follow her hostess, thus separating herself from Lucinde. Both young women are most distraught (221). These scenes emphasize that women, even the most privileged, were frequently subject to others' decisions controlling their movements. In her despair at leaving her friend, the heroine laments the pain of caring for others, declaring " ...si on cherchait seulement le repos, il ne faudrait ni amour, ni amitié..." (221). Lucinde responds by asking her if she would rather not love Laure, Pétrarque, Alphonse or her, and the heroine concedes "...j'aimerais mieux être accablée de toutes sortes de malheurs que de n'être pas aimée par les quatre personnes que vous venez de me nommer et de ne les aimer pas autant que je fais" (222). The mentor again forces Mathilde to recognize the nature of her own sentiments. This passage also underscores Scudéry's social ideal in which friendships with both genders rank as high in importance as romantic relationships. Finally, the context in which the exchange occurs--a painful separation between the two--shows the intensity of the friendship.

The narrator specifies that Mathilde often went to the king's review of the troops "par un sentiment de tendresse; et ordinairement c'était avec sa chère Lucinde, qui lui était une grande consolation" (234). Lucinde accompanies her, as Hekate accompanied Demeter. She is unable to change anything, but offers companionship in an uncertain situation. Similarly,

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<sup>54</sup> See Danielle Haase-Dubosc, *Ravie et enlevée: De l'enlèvement des femmes comme stratégie matrimoniale au XVIIIe siècle*, Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 1999, for historical context on this subject.

after it is decided that the heroine and Alphonse will marry, Lucinde and Théodore both accompany Mathilde to the ceremony. Both women, the one who has been the heroine's confidante and friend, as well as her relative and hostess, function in the archetypal roles of those-who-stand-with-another, accompanying her on the passage to marriage.

Finally, this mentor bids her friend farewell. "Lucinde, toute affligée qu'elle fût de perdre Mathilde, était pourtant ravie de la voir partir" (271). She selflessly sends her friend and protégée off to a new stage of life where she will not follow. This process of willing relinquishment is the final one that occurs in a successful mentoring relationship.

#### Conclusions: Female Mentoring in *Mathilde*

The supportive relationships from which Mathilde benefits are numerous, and the narrator weaves them into every twist of the story. In fact, it seems that the interest and originality of the story lie primarily in the relationships among women. The elements to which the narrator repeatedly returns, and to which she gives psychological nuance, are their friendships. The kinds of support are varied. There is explicit advice given, and there is confirmation of ideas that Mathilde herself already had. Education, the opening of doors to relationships with other friends, praise and affirmation, affection, companionship, and consolation are all offered. Hospitality is given which creates space for learning and for cultivating an independent identity. The narrator specifies the presence of anonymous women who participate in the network of support. We learn of Laure's aunt, of the friend who agreed with Mathilde's aversion to marriage, and of the many serving women who accompanied her through her many transitions, including the occasion when she was taken by force from her room and when she was kept at Théodore's home against her will. It

seems that Scudéry was acutely aware of the many ways in which women help each other, through concrete and practical gifts, as well as with companionship offered at times when there is nothing to do but be present. It seems that she wished to show that importance in her story. Alliances among women appear as central to young women's education, introduction to society, the preservation of reputations, their confronting complex power structures, their exercise of agency, and their psychological well-being.

### Conclusion

Though both Célinte and Mathilde are born into economically privileged families, they and the women around them depend for their lives and freedom upon the king and those close to him. They can be required to marry or prevented from it, forced to move or kept from it. Travel is risky and necessitates a trustworthy male chaperone and a female hostess at the destination. Friendships may be forged, but a separation may occur at any time that a father, a king, or relative requires being somewhere else. Safe space may be sought, but it can always be violated.

For these reasons, surviving or protecting a loved one, preserving one's reputation and privacy, learning to negotiate a complex social environment, maintaining some control over one's own life, and finding comfort and encouragement required the support of other women. Scudéry vividly portrays this dynamic in both of these novellas. These two works represent an important moment in the author's long career because they take place in settings much closer to the reality of the author and her readers than did her long novels and are also different from the novellas that follow *Mathilde*. Beginning with *Promenade à Versailles*, the author will scrupulously dedicate her works to the king and weave praise of him into the



texts. *Céline* and *Mathilde* depict with striking clarity the effects of absolute power on women and suggest some of the ways in which women's alliances might resist it by supporting each other's journeys.

## Chapter 5

### Female Mentoring in Marivaux's *La double inconstance* and *La mère confidente*

#### Introduction

D'Alembert reportedly said of Marivaux, “Il avait le malheur de ne pas estimer beaucoup Molière, et le malheur plus grand de ne pas s'en cacher” (Arland XIII). Indeed, in a division of eighteenth-century intellectuals between the Moderns, who sought new forms and ideas in creative work, and the Ancients, who saw ancient Greece and the classicism of seventeenth-century France as enduring templates for art and literature, Marivaux identified himself with the former group. His publications *Le Télémaque travesti*, a parody of Fenelon's *Télémaque*<sup>55</sup> (1736) and *l'Homère travesti ou l'Iliade en vers burlesque* (1716), satirical and irreverent in tone, demonstrate his “[refus du] cultre du héros” (Rubellin 8). Marivaux differentiated himself from seventeenth-century theater in theme, style, and venue. While the two plays considered in this study respect the unity of place, time, and subject so prized in classicism, the playwright made the daring choice to work mostly with the Théâtre-Italien<sup>56</sup> rather than with the venerable Comédie Française (Arland XV).

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<sup>55</sup> The work is discussed in Chapter 3.

<sup>56</sup> The theater was located in the former hôtel de Bourgogne, on the rue Mauconseil. The first Italian troupe was summoned from Venice to France in the sixteenth century by Henri III to play in Blois. Their presence in France was continuous until Louis XIV closed the Théâtre-Italien in 1697, finding them immoral (Arland XV); Rubellin specifies that the king accused them of having mocked Madame de Maintenon in one of their plays (10). Following the death of the king in 1715, the regent Philippe d'Orléans called the Italian actors back to France; the theater was reopened in 1716 (Rubellin 10).

The troupe of actors at the Théâtre-Italien, selected and directed by Luigi Riccoboni, greatly influenced Marivaux's plays. Silvia and Flaminia were the names of the actresses who played the two leading young women in many of the comedies, such as *La double inconstance*, and bestowed their names upon the characters. We can see that as Marivaux wrote, he did so with the actors in mind. For example, Silvia's skill in the French language, superior to that of her fellow players,<sup>57</sup> contributed to the large number of lines assigned to her characters.

The Italian actors' style also significantly shaped the dialogue that Marivaux wrote for them. Rubellin explains,

Frédéric Deloffre<sup>58</sup> a montré que l'une des caractéristiques majeures du marivaudage, l'enchaînement des répliques de mots, peut s'expliquer par le fait que les Comédiens-Italiens, à l'époque où ils improvisaient encore, étaient obligés d'être très attentifs aux répliques de leur partenaire, et choisissaient comme pivots du dialogue des mots sur lesquels ils rebondissaient. (11)

The symbiotic relationship between the playwright and the Italian actors can be seen in his plays in several ways. In the tradition of the *commedia dell'arte*, characters are types rather than individuals, settings are fairy-tale-like rather than realistic, and language is emphasized more than action.

Marivaux's plays were also nurtured by the salons and theaters of Paris. He frequently attended the gatherings held by Madame de Lambert et de Madame de Tencin (XV); we can see the impact of the former in *La mère confidente*, which explores the theme of the education of a young girl, a topic of great importance to Madame de Lambert.<sup>59</sup> He

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<sup>57</sup> Silvia's spoken French was the best in the troupe because she had been raised in Toulouse (Scherer 8). Arland and Verhoeff both note the dominance of female speech in Marivaux' theater; the former attributes it to Silvia's and Flaminia's superior linguistic abilities.

<sup>58</sup> Deloffre's book *Une préciosité nouvelle. Marivaux et le marivaudage* was first published in 1955 as part of the Annales of the Université de Lyon.

<sup>59</sup> Lambert wrote several essays of advice to young people (Chapter 2).

was also a regular spectator at the unofficial theaters of the Foires of Saint-Germain and Saint-Laurent, where he probably saw *L'Ecole des amants* by Lesage, which shares several aspects of plot with *La double inconstance*.

### Female Mentoring in *La double inconstance*

#### Story

Anouilh called *La double inconstance* “l’histoire élégante et gracieuse d’une crime” (Rubellin 27). It recounts the story of a prince who must marry one of his subjects and has chosen Silvia, a young woman from a village whom he has seen while out surveying his kingdom. Following his orders, the prince’s men have kidnapped her and brought her to the palace, where she is being held; the monarch hopes that she will consent to marrying him. The law forbids his using force to obtain what he wants,<sup>60</sup> so he must now place himself in the position of suppliant and attempt to win her love and her hand. When his initial attempts at coercion fail, one of his servants, Flaminia, undertakes to arrange the situation so that her master will be able marry the woman he has chosen. She will marry Silvia’s beau, Arlequin, and Silvia will marry the prince. The action of the play then consists of the unfolding of Flaminia’s plan, which is ultimately successful. Both Silvia and Arlequin independently choose a new love found at court and abandon the union to which they swore fidelity at the story’s beginning. The play ends with the engagements of two new couples.

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<sup>60</sup> As noted by Françoise Rubellin, the prince’s language is ambiguous (49): “[L]a loi... me défend d’user de violence ...” (I,2). It is not clear whether he does not want to use violence or whether he would like to use it but is forbidden by the law.

## Mentor

This table and analysis are constructed differently from the others in this study that examine mentoring relationships. Because Flaminia is both choreographer and participant from the second scene onward, her influence on the heroine includes scenes in which she is with Silvia as well as apart from her. The analysis thus approaches the mentor's impact as including all words and actions that affect the two women's relationship or the heroine's future.

Table 5.1: Flaminia (M) as mentor to Silvia (H), the heroine

Other characters: the prince (P), Arlequin (A), and Lisette (L)

Act, Scene	Statement or action by M	Implication for H
I, 2	M has tried, unsuccessfully, to discourage P from keeping H at the palace.	M is not a decision-maker and does not have the power to remove H from the situation.
I, 2	M indicates H's own vanity as a means to change her mind	M plans to lead H to make the decision to marry the prince.
I, 2	M knows that P and H had a series of encounters before.	H already has affection for P; M is therefore giving her what she really wants anyway.
I, 2	M announces, "...je me charge du reste...." P: "J'y consens."	M will act as agent-of-P in determining H's fate.
I, 3	M's first attempt in carrying her plan out is to enlist L (Lisette) to attract A (Arlequin)	M's goal is to please the prince, not to win A for herself. ( It is not M's goal to steal H's beau.)
I, 6	M declares to the prince how the rest of the story will unfold.	It is M, not H, whose will determines the outcome of events that affect them both.
I, 8	M is witness and chaperone to H and A's reunion. Her language is tender and maternal. She tells her tale of a lost love.	M inserts herself into A and H's drama at the palace from the beginning; they are three rather than two. A is sympathetic toward M already.
II, 1	M and H appear alone together for the first time; H poses many questions to M, who in turn offers advice.	M will be H's confidante and guide to life at the palace, and H solicits that relationship.

II, 1, II, 2, II, 3, II, 6, II, 7, III, 2	M presents H with a series of encounters, alternating flattery (from her and from the prince) with invented insults and gossip (from other women at court).	H increasingly trusts only M and wishes to prove the ill-speaking women wrong by marrying P. The location of her identity shifts away from the village and toward the court.
II, 3	Re P's gifts to H, M declares, "Je responds de tout."	M asserts her status as acting with the authority of P; H's trust in M increases.
II, 4; III, 3	M reveals to A her vulnerability and deepening sentiments. She evokes the possibility of dismissal by P, meaning destitution.	M increases A's affection and sympathy for her; he is more likely to leave H.
II, 8	M acts as H's confidante to hear about the scene with Lisette.	H feels solidarity with M and confides her growing ambiguity toward A.
II, 8	M questions H's feelings for A and suggests that she might marry A herself.	H reveals the depth of her confusion both to M and the audience.
III, 1	M declares to P that she has "pris du gout" for A and that she will be "victorieuse et vaincue."	M's words imply that she has been taken by surprise by her own plan; this interpretation detracts from a view of her as detached manipulator of A & H.
III, 7	In the third and final scene between the two women, M questions H, who states that she loves the officer (P) but doesn't want A to forget her.	M is H's confidante, drawing out revelations that would otherwise be unavailable to the spectator.

As seen in the table, Flaminia simultaneously assumes two functions, which may seem to be conflicting. She is a guide and friend to Silvia, helping her discover her own desires and navigate the new universe that is the palace. At the same time, she is manipulating her. It may, therefore, seem problematic to read her as a mentor to Silvia. After all, she tricks the woman whose friend she pretends to be, steals her fiancé, and pushes her to marry the man who kidnapped her.

Flaminia's quality as mentor in this play rests principally on four factors. First, as a servant to the prince, she has no choice but to do his bidding. She is, however, clever enough

to make the heroine, herself, and Arlequin happy (which is not essential) *as well as* the prince (which is essential). Second, as we have seen in Chapter 3, a mentor, like Athena herself, is not required to be transparent with her protégée. Thirdly, evidence within the text suggests that Flaminia was in fact helping Silvia get what she wanted anyway. Finally, regardless of how we judge her interventions, it is undeniable that she functioned as a guide and confidante to the heroine, who found herself in unknown territory. Her practical assistance links her to helpers like Théodore in Scudéry's *Mathilde* and Nausicaa in the *Odyssey*, and her inquisitiveness recalls mentors like Mélise in *Célinde*, who asks her young friend many questions before agreeing to help her.

#### Servant to the Prince

Although the setting is fairy-tale-like, the play does present people in the social categories who lived in France in 1723;<sup>61</sup> there is a monarch, a court whose purpose is to do his bidding, and villagers who are under the monarch's power. Marcel Arland observes, "Malgré l'irréalité du décor et l'invraisemblance de la donnée... le milieu se précise..." (XLIII). If Louis XV had seized a woman he wanted to marry and brought her to court, what could a serving woman have done to change his mind? It would have been, as Flaminia succinctly says, "inutile."

The mentor first appears in the second scene of the play, when the audience knows that the prince has had Silvia kidnapped and brought to the palace in hopes of marrying her and that she is resistant to him. The servant's first line has the function of underscoring her lack of power at the court. Trivelin suggests to the prince, "...[S]i j'osais dire ma pensée, le

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<sup>61</sup> Louis XV had reached the age of majority (13) the year before, 1722, and had been crowned at the cathedral in Reims, ending the regency of Philippe d'Orléans that followed the death of Louis XIV in 1715.

meilleur serait de la remettre où on l'a prise."<sup>62</sup> Flaminia replies, "J'ai déjà dit la même chose au Prince, mais cela est inutile; ainsi continuons, et ne songeons qu'à détruire l'amour de Silvia pour Arlequin" (I,2). Her declaration that she has already tried to dissuade the Prince from his chosen course underscores two important points. First, it emphasizes her status as a servant rather than a ruler; both she and Trivelin would advise the prince to abandon the project of seducing Silvia. Because he is the sovereign, however, their objections are "inutile[s]." Second, her statement makes it clear that she has no interest in Arlequin at this point. Although her dominance and success throughout the rest of the play make it tempting to forget her underlying powerlessness, she is merely aiming to serve her master as her job and status require.

She explains her strategy for undoing Silvia's will: "...[M]ais elle a un coeur, et par conséquent de la vanité, avec cela, je saurai bien la ranger à son devoir de femme." This elucidation of her plan provides the spectator with the idea that the change in Silvia will be her own choice; it also offers critical clarification of Flaminia's understanding of the "devoir de femme" that they both share--that is, to do what is expected of them by the male authority. No more than the serving woman imagines that she might argue with her master about the rights of the woman who was abducted does she think that Silvia might have the option of resisting his will. Because of his power, his desire carries the weight of that-which-must-occur, and arranging things in that manner becomes, in Flaminia's perception, a "devoir," and she operates from the assumption that it is her job to lead the other woman to reach the same conclusion.

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<sup>62</sup> This suggestion, with its use of the impersonal *on*, is the most explicit statement made by the prince or any of his agents that acknowledges having taken Silvia by force in order to bring her to court in the first place.



The historical context in which the play was written is again evident in Flaminia's interaction with the first woman who is assigned to seduce Arlequin away from Siliva. The mistress-of-action chooses as her first step to enlist Lisette to charm the heroine's beau. She asks the other young woman, "Saurais-tu avec une adresse naïve et modeste inspirer un tendre penchant à quelqu'un, en lui témoignant d'en avoir pour lui, et le tout pour une bonne fin?" (I, 3) This choice accentuates that Flaminia did not set out to obtain Arlequin for herself. Had her initial strategy succeeded, the other servant, her sister Lisette, would have married him, and Flaminia's own status would not have changed. It seems clear therefore that her motivation is to please the prince, rather than to obtain a man or a change in social status for herself. When her sister initially objects to feigning tenderness, "Mais le pauvre garçon, si je ne l'aime pas, je le tromperai; je suis fille d'honneur, et je m'en fais un scrupule," Flaminia replies, "S'il vient à t'aimer, tu l'épouseras, et cela te fera ta fortune; as-tu encore des scrupules? Tu n'es non plus que moi, que la fille d'un domestique du Prince, et tu deviendras grande dame" (I, 3). Both are daughters of one the Prince's servants. Flaminia's lack of status is emphasized, and her comment shows both savvy and a sense of concern for her sister, another woman whose possibilities for escaping a life as a servant are limited. She knows that an opportunity to marry up the social ladder means financial stability, and the fact that she first offers this chance to her sister demonstrates generosity. She clearly understands women's general dependence upon men for both material security and social standing.

### The Mentor Takes her Mask

*Mentor* and *mentoring*, in ancient literature and every-day usage, cover a variety of relationships and functions. In the *Odyssey*, Athena deceived her protégé for the duration of

their time together concerning her very identity. To the extent that the text from which the term *mentoring* comes may serve as a guide to its meaning, transparency between mentor and protégée does not appear to be a necessity.

When Lisette fails to please Arlequin, Flaminia declares, "...[C]'est maintenant à moi à tenter l'aventure" (I, 6). The prince despairs that he will ever obtain the object of his affection, but his determined servant reassures him. She both reiterates her control over the action and inserts herself into the role of Arlequin's bride, specifically announcing how the play will unfold:

Et moi je vous dis, Seigneur, que j'ai vu Arlequin, qu'il me plaît à moi, que je me suis mis dans la tête de vous rendre content; que je vous ai promis que vous le seriez, que je vous tiendrai parole... oh vous ne me connaissez pas. Quoi, Seigneur, Arlequin et Silvia me résisteraient? Je ne gouvernais pas deux coeurs de cette espèce-là, moi qui l'entrepris, moi qui opinionnière, moi qui suis femme? C'est tout dire.<sup>63</sup> Eh mais j'irais me cacher, mon sexe me renoncerait. Seigneur, vous pouvez en toute sûreté ordonner les apprêts de votre mariage... je vous garantis aimé, je vous garantis marié... Arlequin m'épouse, vous nous honorez de vos bienfaits, et voilà qui est fini. (I, 6)

Flaminia specifies three factors that motivate her: Arlequin is attractive to her, she wants to please the prince, and she knows that if she is successful, her financial future will be secured by the grateful ruler. She also makes two statements that reveal how she constructs her identity. First, she stresses that in her own eyes, she is fundamentally *of the court*, not *of the village*; this is what separates her from the "deux coeurs de cette espèce-là." Éric Négrel situates the opposition of worlds found in *La double inconstance* as an example of a transfer:<sup>64</sup> "des personnages de leur univers d'origine dans un autre, contigu, qui leur est étranger: Arlequin et Silvia arrachés à leur village et transportés dans le palais du Prince..." (321). Because they have been transplanted from a world of familiarity to one that is foreign to them, they need the insider's knowledge that the serving woman possesses. In addition to

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<sup>63</sup> This speech and this line in particular demonstrate Verhoeff's observation that in "l'univers marivaudien," "...[L]a femme est et reste maîtresse de sa parole et il n'y a pas de parole vraiment supérieure à la sienne" (1).

<sup>64</sup> Négrel attributes the concept of *transfer* in this context to Jean-Paul Sermain.

identifying herself as *of the court*, Flaminia also identifies herself through her gender, saying, “...[M]oi qui suis femme? C’est tout dire.” That is, *because she is a woman*, she is confident in her ability to exploit the natures of the newcomers and to achieve her desired end.

Once her plan is set in motion, Flaminia establishes a maternal relationship with the village-dwellers, calling them “mes chers enfants” (I, 8). Before leaving them alone, she recounts the story of a lost lover who resembled Arlequin, using a seemingly innocent narrative to insert herself into their story from the beginning of their stay at court, and then accepts with great pleasure when the young man invites her to have lunch with him.<sup>65</sup> It is not clear to what extent she planned that specific event and to what extent she is truly developing affection for Arlequin, that is, falling prey to her own plan: “le masque *prend*”<sup>66</sup> (Verhoeff 49).

### Uncovering the Protégée’s Desire

The “dramaturge dans la comédie” (Jean Rousset) elicits from the Prince an account of his previous encounters with Silvia: “...Silvia vous connaît déjà sans savoir que vous êtes le Prince, n’est-il pas vrai?” He offers the details: “Je l’ai vue cinq ou six fois... comme simple officier du palais: mais quoiqu’elle m’ait traité avec beaucoup de douceur, je n’ai jamais pu la faire renoncer à Arlequin, qui m’a surpris deux fois avec elle.”<sup>67</sup> The facts that

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<sup>65</sup> The stage directions state that Flaminia “veut s’en aller.” A production done by Théâtre du Nord-Ouest, Paris, in 2005, suggests that it was her idea to stay. The actress walks slowly away from the center of the stage smiling, looking back periodically at Arlequin until he suggests that she join him for lunch (production of Dec. 11, 2005, rue de Faubourg- Montparnasse). Such a reading of her presents her more as confident director/manipulator than as surprised participant in the action.

<sup>66</sup> The italics are Verhoeff’s.

<sup>67</sup> As Rubellin comments (49), this account gives temporal depth to the relationship between Silvia and the Prince, making her eventual decision believable while permitting Marivaux to limit the action of the play to a

their encounters were repeated, included being caught together by Arlequin and even discussing Silvia's leaving her beau suggest that the meetings were not due to chance. In other words, it seems that the young woman chose to see him several times without Arlequin's knowledge. We receive this information after the first scene, which is filled with Silvia's self-righteous anger at being held against her will. The order in which the facts are presented undermines the audience's sense of empathy with the heroine. While a sense of indignation at the injustice of her kidnapping has not disappeared, the audience is invited to snicker a bit at Silvia, along with Flaminia, because we know that the young woman's professed untouchable devotion to Arlequin is slightly exaggerated. This juxtaposition of Silvia-as-outraged-victim with Silvia-as-sneaky-lover is one of the comic elements of the play and is essential to the audience's acceptance of the play's outcome.<sup>68</sup>

Susan Wiltshire proposes that mentoring is related to "discernment of choices rather than with self-advancement in choices already made" (2). Marivaux offers indications in several scenes in the play of Silvia's affection for the man whom she learns to be the prince. Françoise Rubellin observes that "l'amour de Silvia pour le Prince a... commencé à naître bien avant le début de l'action théâtrale, ce qui empêche de trouver précipité leur mariage final" (23). Marivaux insists upon the past that Silvia and the prince share. It therefore appears that Silvia's eventual marriage to the prince, instead of a result imposed upon her by the manipulative Flaminia, was rather her own desire--a desire that, as Rubellin notes, existed well before the opening action of the play. The servant's role is to observe the other

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single day and thereby respect the unity of place, time, and action that was still expected in the theater in eighteenth-century France.

<sup>68</sup> This discrepancy between Silvia's initial self-presentation and the audience's developing view of her, is a prime example of the comedy noted by Verhoeff: "La femme est privilégiée.... Mais elle doit payer cette prévalence discursive.... [E]n parlant, la femme s'expose.... On admire, mais on rit aussi" (1).

woman's internal struggles and to nudge her toward what she wants.<sup>69</sup> Although Flaminia encourages the heroine, it is Silvia herself who makes the decisive statements that conclude her alliance with Arlequin and open the possibility of a union with the Prince.

The two women appear alone together for the first time in the first scene of Act II. Silvia takes an active role in recruiting Flaminia as a mentor. She requests information and insight about the other people at court. Of twenty-nine sentences that the heroine utters in the scene, sixteen are questions. After the serving woman wins Silvia's trust by confiding her own story of lost love, Silvia volunteers that "...si j'avais eu à changer Arlequin contre un autre, ç'aurait été contre un officier du palais... (II, 1)." This confession shows that the heroine sees Flaminia as a friend and confidante, reveals that the ideal of an unbreakable union with Arlequin is gone, and also underscores the comic element of the play and the character. The state of Silvia's emotions is neatly summarized in her line, "Mais mon plaisir, où est-il? Il n'est ni là, ni là, je le cherche" (II, 8). Her uncertainty is such that she is dependent upon Flaminia's questions and perceptive listening in order to discover her own desires.

### Guide in a New World

Négrel proposes that *La double inconstance* offers an example of the *topos* of the world turned upside down, in the tradition of the *fête des Fous* or carnival. The arrival of Silvia and Arlequin at the palace signals the onset of the reversal of normalcy, and Flaminia functions as guide of the newcomers in this universe in which they suddenly find themselves.

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<sup>69</sup> This reading of the mentor is complicated by the fact that she announces her plan to the prince long before she has spent any time with Silvia--and includes her own plans to marry Arlequin before she has developed any tenderness for him. The reader is therefore left with uncomfortable uncertainties: *Who are the villains? Who is to be admired?* It seems that this very ambiguity may be part of Marivaux's craft. Indeed, the play is "amoral à souhait" (Verhoeff 49).

Each of the scenes between the two women shows her filling that role. The heroine relies on the servant for information about the court, the Prince's intentions, and what might happen next. Négrel's evocation of a "monde renversé [qui] se diffracte en un univers de pensée lié au carnaval, imprégné de culture populaire... hanté par une mythologie archaïque et un merveilleux païen" (323) suggests a reading of the play as allegorical. The image of Flaminia as expert associates her with figures in both the *Odyssey* and the *Hymn to Demeter* who help outsiders find their way. The young princess Nausicaa directs Odysseus to her father's palace where shelter and replenishment may be found, and the daughters of Metaneira greet a grief-stricken Demeter at the well and lead her to their mother's house to work and recover strength before confronting Zeus. Like the young women in those ancient stories who guide strangers new to their lands, Flaminia is without power, but does possess insider's knowledge. Much as Nausicaa can tell Odysseus the way to her father's palace and what to say when he arrives, Flaminia, agent-of-the-prince, can tell Silvia what to expect from him.

If we read the play as an example of "subversion carnavalesque" (Négrel 323), then the carnival, the reversal of the proper order, is set into motion when Flaminia, a servant and a female, assumes control of the action, supplanting the prince in Scene 8 of Act I. The subversive nature of her actions and of Marivaux's play lies in the fact that rather than witnessing a return to the normal order, as occurs in *Le Jeu de l'amour et du hasard*, in which the social classes are properly sorted out in marriage, the two young women in this play undergo a permanent change in physical location and social status. Silvia will be transformed from villager to princess, and Flaminia will shed her role as servant to become a

“grande dame” (I,3) by marrying Arlequin. For the women, the carnivalesque order becomes the real one.

#### Conclusions: Female Mentoring in *La double inconstance*

Through her advice, manipulation, and participation in a drama in which she is an actor as well as director, Flaminia assures financial security and increased social standing for Silvia and for herself, along with satisfaction in love for all four principal characters. She upsets the social order by permanently trading locations with Silvia, from the court to the village and vice-versa. She guides the outsiders at court and tells them what they need to know, albeit without telling them all that she knows. Unlike the literary mentors in Scudéry’s stories, Flaminia’s own life is not yet settled. She is therefore simultaneously trying to establish herself and the other young woman. As a servant in the prince’s court, she takes pleasing the prince as a necessary starting point for arranging a happy outcome for all. There is no possibility of shirking her duty by, for example, helping Silvia escape from the palace to rejoin Arlequin and return to the village. Within the confines of her world, Flaminia successfully transports her protégée and herself to more comfortable lives and elevated status. For a seemingly powerless servant in the prince’s court, it is quite an accomplishment.

In Flaminia, Marivaux presents a woman who is strong as well as vulnerable. Both qualities are specifically related to her status as female. The speech that he gives her in Scene 6, Act I explicitly states that being a woman is what guarantees the success of her plan, and gender is evoked also to explain why compliance with the prince’s desire is a *duty* for Silvia. Marivaux seems thus to praise women and also to demonstrate the fragility of their condition. The play is not a call for revolution in societal mores. His tone is consistently

light in this comedy; for example, the audience's sympathy for Silvia is tempered by laughter. He clearly shows what women's status was. Does he also imply that it should be different, or does he merely praise women like Flaminia who can successfully cope in a world that will never be fair?

### Female Mentoring in *La mère confidente*

#### Story

While Marivaux is chiefly remembered for his *comédies d'amour*, in *La mère confidente* he takes steps with in the direction of the emerging genre of the *drame bourgeois*. While some, such as Marcel Arland, definitively classify it under that rubric (LXII), others find that it is only retrospectively that we may see links attaching Marivaux to the later Diderot or to *La Chaussée* (Goldzink 265).<sup>70</sup> The story has a happy ending but treats serious subjects such as filial loyalty, trust, and financial concerns in a tone much heavier than that of *La double inconstance*.

In the play, young Angélique finds love in a chance encounter in the countryside with Dorante, causing great concern to her mother, Madame Argante, who plans to marry her to a wealthy gentleman and disapproves of the means by which the young couple made each other's acquaintance. The mother's techniques for keeping track of her daughter's life are as diverse as her roles. She combines appealing to the young woman's sincerity and frankness with spying on her through the services of the servant Lubin.<sup>71</sup> Angélique, in turn, alternates

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<sup>70</sup> Goldzink writes, "Mon hypothèse est qu'il faut passer par Diderot, non seulement pour réfléchir sur Beaumarchais, qui s'en réclame, mais pour approcher de ce qui se joue dans le refus de Marivaux d'emboîter le sillage des moralisateurs et des sentimentaux, ou de les précéder comme tout semblait l'y destiner" (265-266).

<sup>71</sup> As will be further discussed, Anne Rivara notes the insincerity of the mother's proposal that the two women share secrets *with each other*, when she, of course, reveals nothing to her daughter about surveilling her (89).



transparency and suspicion vis-à-vis her mother. At one point, Dorante, desperate to marry his beloved and quite certain that Madame Argante will never consent to their union, proposes that Angélique elope<sup>72</sup> with him. This proposition destroys the young woman's confidence in her beau and leads to dissolving her ability to navigate the conflicting forces of her wish to be with Dorante and her compassion for her mother's feelings and sense of duty toward her. She appeals to her mother to play the role of mediator and to resolve the conflict, even though she knows that she is one of the potential threats to happiness with Dorante: "...[S]ecourez-moi... contre moi, contre Dorante et contre vous, qui nous séparez peut-être" (III, 8). Madame Argante responds by assuming a third role--that of a fictional aunt to whom her "niece" has confided everything. In this guise, she meets with the young man, questions his motives for the proposal of an elopement, forces both young people to consider the eventual consequences of such an act, and after they both admit their foolishness and cede to her superior judgment, she reveals her true identity and blesses the union.

### Mentor

As Rivara notes, the theatrical role of *suivante*/ *confidente* is split in this piece in which Marivaux challenges his audiences' conceptions of the role and explores its boundaries, since traditionally, "Les amies de confiance, soubrettes et femmes de chambre, se nomment 'suivante' dans la comédie" (77). There is a Lisette in the role of *suivante* to the young heroine, but it is the mother who successfully places herself in the role of her daughter's primary *confidente*.

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<sup>72</sup> He proposes an *enlèvement*, the connotations of which are discussed in greater detail both here and in Chapter 2.

Two aspects of the mother's character are unusual. First, Marivaux poses the question of the extent to which a mother can be a friend. Madame Argante is also in the relatively unusual situation in eighteenth-century theater of being the sole surviving parent and thus holding all decision-making power concerning her daughter's future. Therefore, concentrated in a single character, we find the functions of father, mother, and friend/servant, which is to say the full range of roles from the all-powerful to the powerless. Madame Argante and Angélique explicitly articulate the problematic nature of the mother's multiple roles:

MADAME ARGANTE: "...[F]ais-moi ta confidente."

ANGÉLIQUE: "Vous, la confidente de votre fille?"

MADAME ARGANTE: "Oh! votre fille! eh! qui te parle d'elle? Ce n'est point ta mère qui veut être ta confidente; c'est ton amie, encore une fois."

ANGÉLIQUE: "D'accord, mais mon amie redira tout à ma mère, l'une est inséparable de l'autre."

MADAME ARGANTE: Eh bien! je les sépare, moi... (I,8).

The table and discussion that follow detail their interactions and how the young woman is affected. Characters are designated as Angélique (H), the heroine, Madame Argante (M), the mentor, and Dorante (D), Angélique's beau.

Table 5.2: Functions of Madame Argante (M) Mentoring Angélique (H)

Act, Scene	Aspect of Angélique's (H) and Madame Argante's (M) relationship	Implication for H
I, 1; II, 2	M is portrayed as tough & protective and unlikely to be impressed by a <i>légitime</i> .	A potential conflict with the mother is evoked from the beginning.
I, 5	M plans to marry H to a wealthy older man.	H may be financially secure but be unable to choose her mate.
I, 7	M pays a servant to spy on H.	H's relationship with M is not transparent, as she assumes it is.
I, 8	In M & H's first scene together, M proposes that H see her as confidante rather than mother. H confesses her love for D. M condemns the liaison.	H and D's secret is out. H repents of her actions, loses faith in D, and decides to end the relationship. She now mistrusts all but M.
I, 9; II, 3	Obeys M, H refuses D's letter.	The couple may dissolve.
II, 4-5	H questions M's judgment & determines that D is good after all.	H exhibits independence. She decides to ignore M's counsel.
II, 6	H & D reunite, only to contemplate the impossibility of a union b/c of M. D proposes an <i>enlèvement</i> . H is shocked, refuses, plans to plead with M for clemency and approval.	H is willing to disregard M's advice, but not to run away and marry without her blessing. She is also unwilling to hurt or insult her.
II, 9	"...[Q]u'elle m'aime... mieux; car je ne suis point contente d'elle."	H grows increasingly impatient with M, hints that she might revolt.
II, 12	In M & H's second scene together, H at first claims to have broken ties with D, then admits all to M and pleads for help. M proposes to meet with D in the guise of H's aunt.	H cedes total control of the situation to M.
III, 8	In M & H's third scene, H asks her mother to protect her, act her in place, and to speak to D.	H asks M to be her <i>porte-parole</i> .
III, 11	M forces D to explain his proposition of an elopement, <sup>73</sup> and convinces both young people of the damage it would have done to H's reputation. They agree with M's judgment, and M blesses the union.	H, along with D, rejects their previous dependence upon passion in favor of respect for caution and preservation of the young woman's honor and relationship with M.

<sup>73</sup> As explained in Chapter 2 with reference to Haase-Dubosc's *Ravie et enlevée*, *enlèvements* were a relatively common marital strategy of which the efficacy depended precisely on the fact that it was difficult to determine the extent to which a woman had consented to the act. Therefore, translating the word as either *abduction* or *elopement* emphasizes only one of its connotations (violence or illicit romance).

The strong bond between the two women is established as early as the second line of the play; Angélique has not accompanied her servant Lisette who is meeting her young suitor Dorante because "...[E]lle est avec sa mère." As we shall see in Graffigny's play *Cénie*, Marivaux immediately shows an image of a practical, shielding mother through other characters' dialogue before she appears on stage herself. When Dorante reveals that, as a younger son, his will be only a tiny inheritance, the *légitime*,<sup>74</sup> Lisette is dismayed, knowing, "Vraiment Angélique vous épouserait volontiers, mais nous avons une mère qui ne sera pas tentée de votre légitime..." (I, 1). In contrast with the other mentors considered here, Madame Argante has explicit power over her daughter's fate. She is not dying (like Mathilde's mother Constance) or unrecognized (like Cénie's mother Orphise). Rather, as Angélique's only living parent, she is the sole decision-maker concerning her future. Her perspective is therefore female not in the sense that her own power is limited by the presence of a husband whose decision can over-rule hers, but rather in her own experience of the world and her awareness of women's fragility therein. In the first act, we learn that she plans to marry her daughter to a somewhat older, wealthy man, that she suspects an intrigue that might undermine her plans, and that she engages the servant Lubin to spy on her daughter. For Rivara, this choice exposes a deep lack of sincerity on the part of the mother who purports to seek a relationship of mutual confidence: "Angélique voit bien l'opposition entre les deux rôles, mais elle ne voit pas que sa 'confidente' qui est aussi meneur de l'action, ne

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<sup>74</sup> In order to keep wealth concentrated and thereby preserve their power in relation to other families, aristocrats typically endowed the first-born son with all the parental property and most of the money. Younger offspring, like Dorante, only received the *légitime*, barely enough for one person to live on (Chap. 2). For further reading on the privileging of the family over the individual under the Ancien Régime, see Jean Portemer's article, "Réflexion sur les pouvoirs de la femme selon le droit français au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Dix-septième siècle* 144 (1984): 189-202, cited in Chapter 2 of this study.

lui ‘confie’ rien” (89). Lack of transparency with the protégée is of course a quality that Madame Argante shares with Flaminia.

In Scene 8 of Act I, the mother successfully convinces her daughter to accept her as a confidante, despite the young woman’s reluctance and understanding that her mother has not abandoned the authoritative nature of her position. Angélique confesses her love and recounts the story of meeting Dorante, provoking her dismayed *confidente* to reclaim fully the parental role: “Je t’offre, si tu le veux, de reprendre ma qualité de mere pour te... defendre [de revoir Dorante]” (I, 8). As we shall see in Orphise’s concerns for her charge in Graffigny’s *Cénie*, Madame Argante has two fears for daughter: a loss of respect in society and the pain of disappointment with a young man whose long-term consistency might not match the enthusiasm of his initial promises.

A distressed Angélique accepts her mother’s interpretation of events and, by the end of the scene, resolves to end her liaison with Dorante. When, however, the young man falls into despair at the idea of having displeased his beloved (II, 2-3), she calls him back to her and reaffirms her passion (II, 6). This decision constitutes an important stage in Angélique’s relationship with her mother because it demonstrates her willingness to make a choice against the latter’s counsel. It is the first and only moment in the play when we see that defiance.

Scene 6 of Act II shows the young man emboldened by Angélique’s renewed declaration of love and despairing that Madame Argante will ever permit the two to wed; he proposes an elopement (*un enlèvement*). The young woman, in turn, immediately reverts to her sense of loyalty, obedience, and compassion for her mother, and condemns Dorante for the scandalous suggestion. This scene represents a turning point in the heroine’s internal

struggle concerning whom to trust. She attempts to hide the truth from her mother in their next encounter, beginning with the aside, “Pas de confidence, Lisette a raison...” (II, 12) but quickly loses her resistance and confides everything (II, 12). As she correctly states, by the end of the scene, she no longer has the option of escaping and marrying in secret: “Je me repens d’avoir tout dit; mon amour m’est cher, je viens de m’ôter la liberté de céder... (II, 12). By bringing her mother completely into her confidence, she limits her choices but also wins sympathy and motivates the older woman to want to help her. Madame Argante proposes, “...[L]aisse-moi le voir; je lui parlerai sous le nom d’une tante à qui tu auras tout confié, et qui veut te servir. Viens, ma fille, et laisse à mon cœur le soin de conduire le tien” (II, 12). She thus proposes to function as double for her daughter.<sup>75</sup> By accepting her mother’s plan, the heroine chooses to deceive the young man rather her mother--an irreversible choice of trust and loyalty.

In Act III, Scene 8, Angélique abandons herself entirely to her mother’s protection and wisdom:

ANGÉLIQUE: Ne me quittez point, secourez-moi, je ne me reconnais plus.  
 MADAME ARGANTE: Te secourir? Et contre qui, ma chère fille?  
 ANGÉLIQUE: Hélas, contre moi, contre Dorante et contre vous, qui nous séparez peut-être. (III, 8)

The heroine appears to accept the separation between confidante and mother that Madame Argante originally proposed to her. She declares herself overcome by the turbulence of her own emotions and the conflicting influences around her and asks her mother to be her proxy

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<sup>75</sup> As discussed in other chapters, a double may go in place of another, as Orphise does for Cénie in Graffigny’s play (Chapter 6), or may be a companion under difficult circumstances, as Hekate is for Demeter in the *Hymn to Demeter* (Chapter 3) and the abbess is for Céline in Scudéry’s first novella (Chapter 4). Sherman uses the term *double* to describe Zilia’s loyalty toward Céline in Graffigny’s novel *Lettres d’une Péruvienne* (“‘C’est l’insuffisance de notre être qui fait naître l’amitié’” 60).

in making decisions and taking actions.<sup>76</sup> Much as Scudéry's Célinte goes to Mélise and explicitly requests help, Angélique seeks her mother's guidance.

For the remaining scenes of the play, the two women are functioning in concert, rather than in opposition with one another, with Madame Argante taking the lead.<sup>77</sup> She assumes a third role, the aunt of her daughter, and questions the young man and then converts him to her way of thinking. Han Verhoeff<sup>78</sup> has demonstrated the determinant quality of the final scene (III, 11):

Se présentant ensuite comme la tante d'Angélique, elle montre à Dorante combien ce projet [d'enlèvement] est nocif pour la réputation de sa future femme. Son intervention est décisive. Dorante est convaincu et même profondément ébranlé par les reproches de la mère et il est prêt à renoncer à Angélique. Et c'est à ce moment de triomphe que la mère se rend. (41)

Dorante is so thoroughly convinced of the validity of her arguments that he is ready to abandon his love rather than risk Angélique's dishonor or a separation of the mother-daughter pair. As Verhoeff stresses, the specter of a disgraced Angélique, evoked by Madame Argante, is the catalyst for the young man's transformation. The mother asks,

Songez-vous que de parails engagements déshonorent une fille; que sa reputation en demeure ternie, qu'elle en perd l'estime publique; que son époux peut réfléchir un jour qu'elle a manqué de vertu, que la faiblesse honteuse où elle est tombée doit la flétrir à ses yeux mêmes, et la lui rendre méprisable? (III, 11)<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> In Graffigny's *Cénie*, we shall see Orphise similarly assume responsibility for Cénie once it is revealed that she is the young woman's mother.

<sup>77</sup> Orphise also becomes the *porte-parole* for her daughter.

<sup>78</sup> My debt to Verhoeff's analysis of *La double inconstance* and *La mère confidente* is great.

<sup>79</sup> Marivaux does not even mention the full range of dangers run by Dorante in considering an *enlèvement*. As of the edict of 1697 (38 years prior to the premiere of *La mère confidente*), the young man found guilty in such a case was subject to penalties ranging from the loss of absolutely all inheritance, including the *légitime* (protected until 1697) to the death penalty (Chapter 2).

Madame de Lambert, in writing to her daughter, advised that she would be unable to avoid the judgment of her own conscience and the rest of society.<sup>80</sup> Madame Argante evokes both of those tribunals here as well as a third: the young man himself, transformed from a passionate suitor to a husband who, having obtained his goal, might critique his wife for the very choices that he instigated. Verhoeff observes the ambiguity inherent in the mother's victory: "Elle révèle le secret des femmes, qui est leur vulnérabilité sociale, fruit des préjugés de la société qui privilégie le point de vue masculine..." (45). In order to preserve her daughter's good standing before that triangle of judges--her own conscience, society, and her potential spouse--the mother exposes the inequality to which she knows all women may be subject, even within a mutually-chosen union. A horrified Dorante acknowledges the validity of her arguments, basing his transformation on the idea that he could not bear for others to disrespect his beloved. As Verhoeff suggests, however, the speed with which the young man is prepared to abandon his love and return to the mother full responsibility for Angélique implies that the prospect of a perceived fallen woman for a wife provokes as much fear *of* her as *for* her (46-47).

Madame Argante thus educates and frightens the young people, alerting them to dangers exterior and interior of which they had been oblivious. Like Flaminia who initiates Arlequin and Silvia to life at the court and Théodore who explains the Spanish court to Mathilde, this mother imparts her knowledge of an unknown world to those who attempted to rely on youthful passion as their only compass. She must expose the fragile standing of all women in order to protect her daughter, highlighting how deeply women's powerlessness cut

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<sup>80</sup> Annie Rivara cites Madame de Lambert: "Vous avez deux tribunaux inévitables devant lesquels vous devez passer, la conscience et le monde. Vous pouvez échapper au monde, mais vous n'échapperez pas à la conscience. Vous vous devez à vous-même le témoignage que vous êtes une honnête personne. Il ne faut pourtant pas abandonner l'approbation publique, parce que du mépris de la réputation naît le mépris de la vertu." (*à sa fille*, 69-70, cited by Rivara 86)



across all sections of society in Ancien-Régime France. Madame Argante is a wealthy widow<sup>81</sup> and the sole decision-maker concerning her daughter's future. In her own life, she holds both as much power and wealth as many well-to-do patriarchs; her situation is far more privileged than those of most men *and* women. Her sense of vulnerability--projected on her daughter in this scene --and her awareness of the judgment of society, therefore come *uniquely* from her experience as female rather than from any specific aggravating factors such as poverty or an unwanted marriage. It is this reality that she impresses upon Dorante and Angélique, forcing a restructuring of their loyalties and their relationship: it sufficed neither to be rich, nor to be widowed, nor to be loved, to escape the criticism to which women were subject.

#### Conclusions: Female Mentoring in *La mère confidente*

As is the case in *La double inconstance*, Marivaux again paints the portrait of a woman who succeeds in helping a less experienced woman secure a situation that promises societal respect and financial stability. Once again, the means by which the mentoring woman achieves this end are less than transparent to the protégée. As Rivara observes, “Madame Argante aime et trompe sa fille: infiniment plus inquiétante que celle de *L'Ecole des mères* qui n'est qu'une femme autoritaire...” (92). Perhaps the most unsettling element of the character is that she is necessary for the successful dénouement of the comedy. Not only does she function as the *opposant* (Ubersfeld 52) to the young lovers, but she also saves them.<sup>82</sup> Seeking only to satisfy their desires as quickly as possible, Dorante proposes an *enlèvement* to Angélique that causes her to lose confidence in him and respect for him,

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<sup>81</sup> Chapter 2 discusses the relatively privileged position of widows.

<sup>82</sup> As discussed, this is Verhoeff's point.

provoking a crisis in their relationship and nearly unraveling it. Lacking in experience, the heroine is unprepared to cope with two conflicting truths with which she is faced--*J'aime Dorante* and *Je n'ai plus confiance en Dorante*. After the mother learns of the shocking suggestion, her reactions, in conversation with her daughter as well as in her trial of Dorante in the guise of Angélique's aunt, add another dimension to the young woman's increasing panic. She suggests that Angélique's beau has demonstrated a lack of regard for her, a willingness to expose her to a judgment to which, as a man, he will never be subject. A third unacceptable premise is thus added to the mounting confusion in the heroine's mind: *Dorante ne pense pas à moi, à mon avenir*, in other words, *Il ne m'estime pas*. Once the heroine considers these ideas, the young couple no longer has any hope of obtaining a successful outcome alone; "Le pardon de la mère apporte une solution que les amoureux eux-mêmes étaient incapables de trouver" (Verhoeff 47).

Madame Argante may appear insidious because she provokes a crisis that only she can mend. While it is true that Angélique's loss of confidence in her beau results from her mother's fears, her mother was also protecting her from very real dangers. The older woman was well aware of the standards by which women were judged, both in society and even in their own homes. She risked the loss of her daughter's affection in order to guard her against unhappiness later in life.

### Conclusion

When Athena appears on the doorstep of Odysseus's home and presents herself to Telemachus, she is in disguise. She remains that way throughout their time together. She helps the young man secure his father's safe return, but she does not divulge her secrets.

That model of mentoring is essentially what we find in both of these plays. The more experienced women combine ruse and tenderness, both real and affected, in order to lead the young heroines to the conclusions that they want them to reach. Silvia and Angélique are content at the ends of their stories, grateful to their mentors, and unaware of all that was hidden from them.

The images of a woman judged or abandoned, evoked by both maternal characters, are very realistic. Flaminia's future is no more secure than her protégée's. Though the tale that she spins for Arlequin about being sent away by the prince (II, 4) is not actually a threat at that moment, it certainly could be, especially if she should fail in her quest to please her master. Flaminia's resourcefulness saves both herself and Silvia. For Angélique, Madame Argante secures a respectable marriage that allows the young couple the assurance of inheritance from both families and respect for the young woman with her marriage and in the society in which they will live.

At many levels--psychological, material, and perhaps physical--the heroines are saved from certain trouble by their mentors. Flaminia and Madame Argante, the more experienced women, are in very different situations. One is a servant and thus seemingly completely powerless, but her bold assurances to the prince give her temporary control. Madame Argante is legally the ultimate decision-maker in her household, yet her perspective as a woman gives her a keen sense of the pitfalls that may await her daughter. Both mentors, however, know the uncertain terrain around them well enough to help the others, yet neither of them can make it any different. Athena-like, disguises on, they guide each vulnerable young woman, including Flaminia herself, to a place of safe haven.

## Chapter 6

### Graffigny's Other Heroines: Céline in *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* and Orphise in *Cénie*

#### Introduction

Françoise de Graffigny was one of the most prominent women of letters of her day. Born Françoise d'Issembourg du Buisson d'Happoncourt in Nancy, 1695, she married François Huguet de Graffigny at the age of 17. She gave birth to three children, all of whom died in childhood. Her husband's abusiveness and gambling led to a separation after which she found herself, as Perry Gethner notes, "[s]ans argent ni métier" (318). The future author was reduced to living as a kind of permanent guest, dependent upon the charity of friends and their friends. Surely not coincidentally, financial precariousness and the need for hospitality are recurrent themes in her work. Her first publication, *Nouvelle espagnole*, appeared in 1745. *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* (1747) brought great success and was published in several languages. Shortly thereafter, she established her own salon where well-known authors along with those beginning their careers exchanged ideas. She turned to drama when asked by the Austrian emperor to write plays for his children. *Cénie* (1750), another great moment of triumph along with her second novel, ran longer at the Comédie Française than any play by a woman ever had (Gethner 317-320).

This chapter examines the novel *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* and the play *Cénie* through the lens of mentoring relationships between the heroine in each story and another woman. In the novel, narrator Zilia writes alternately of her devoted love for her fiancé Aza, the

complications of her relationship with her benefactor Déterville, and her observations of French society. The play depicts aristocratic heiress Cénie as she hopes to marry, faces a shocking revelation about her familial origins, and discovers both a friend and her mother in her governess. Questions of love and marriage figure at the center of both plots, as they do in most novels and dramas of the period. An important feature of both stories is the importance for each heroine of a female ally.

### Female Mentoring in *Lettres d'une Péruvienne*

#### Story

Zilia is a Peruvian princess who is kidnapped by Spaniards who have destroyed her village and killed most of its inhabitants. These events occur on the day when she was to have married Aza, prince and heir to the throne of the kingdom. On the passage back to Europe, she becomes part of the spoils of a naval battle lost by her captors, falls into the hands of the French, and is brought to France by the ship's captain Déterville. She goes to live with Déterville, his mother and his sister Céline in Paris and there gradually assimilates into French society. She continues to hope for a reunion with Aza, to whom the letters comprising the novel are addressed. The language barrier between the narrator and her French benefactor, however, prevents him from discovering Zilia's feelings for some time. Déterville believes that she hopes for a romantic relationship with him and is dismayed to learn that she is looking to him for help in finding Aza.

During the heroine's stay in Déterville's home, his sister Céline becomes Zilia's friend and mentor. The relationship between the two young women is complicated. Céline's loyalty to her brother at times engenders anger towards their guest who does not return his

amorous feelings, and at times she is too preoccupied to be a satisfactory confidante to Zilia. Graffigny nevertheless portrays Céline's intervention as critical to her friend's developing the confidence and skills necessary to establish a new and independent life.

Despite Déterville's disappointment in Zilia's lack of interest in marrying him, he and his sister work together to use the recovered treasure from Peru to purchase a house for the young woman. Then, when Aza finally arrives in Paris, it is not to begin a new life with Zilia but rather to tell her in person that he has converted to Catholicism and will marry a Spanish woman. The heroine falls into deep despair, but is comforted by Céline and later moves into her new home. Her final letter to Déterville outlines the kind of life she envisions leading there; she invites him to come and, along with his sister, enjoy the delights of friendship and conversation. She affirms her commitment to her new life, writing, "Je suis, je vis, j'existe" (322).

### Mentor

This analysis focuses on how Céline affects Zilia. Table 6.1, on the following page, gives the context for each mention of her name. The letters in the novel in which Zilia is without any female companionship also appear, as do two in which the mentor's name does not appear, but in which her influence is very present. In the table, Zilia appears as *H*, the heroine, and Céline is represented by *M*, the mentor.

<b>Letter</b>	<b>Development in Céline (M) and Zilia's (H) relationship</b>	<b>Development in H's life</b>
1-12	H (Zilia) taken from Peru to Paris, no female contact.	H feels very isolated.
13	H arrives in Paris with Déterville (D), meets M (Céline) and mother. M kind to her. H sent to her room. M and D come comfort her.	H feels a bit of security for the first time in the novel.
14	M has been kind to H.	H begins social criticism.
15	H & M's friendship grows.	H becomes more confident.
17	M's suitor sneaks her a letter in public. H obeys when shushed by M and doesn't tell D.	H chooses loyalty to M rather than to D.
19	D leaves for war. M and H are put in a convent. H observes M's lack of education. H is intermediary for letters between M and her suitor.	H is needed and fulfills a function that creates reciprocity (letter exchange).
20	H wonders where she fits in the French class structure, and M tries to comfort her.	Psychologically bolstered by friendship, H has the courage to ask increasingly hard questions.
23	D returns from war, learns that H will not marry him and loves Aza. M angry at H for hurting her brother.	H experiences M's disappointment in her.
24	H thinks she's lost M's friendship. As H has a fever, M cares for her physical needs, but with little affection.	H regains health. Despite rift in the friendship, H continues to support M's inheritance rights.
25	H laments losing M's and D's affection.	H feels alone, dependent on the absent Aza for affection.
27	H happy for M's having received her rightful inheritance. Friendship re-established.	H learns a lesson from M about generosity and accepting gifts.
28, 29	H attends M's wedding.	H attains a new level of social acceptance, makes observations.
30	M has less time for H.	H feels neglected by married M.
31	M is unaware of H's increasing dissatisfaction.	H is restless, jealous of M's happiness.
32	H stays in the home of M and husband and accompanies M on social visits.	H enters French society as M's social equal.
33, 34		H critiques French society.
35	M and D present H with her own home, purchased with Peruvian treasure.	H can have an independent life.
37	M is hostess for H and Aza, treats H well despite D's flight to Malta.	H receives hospitality from M.
39	After H learns (Letter 38) that Aza has betrayed her, H attempts suicide, and M nurses her back to health.	H regains her health and life.
40	H is grateful for M's care. M disapproves of H's living alone.	H settles into her new home alone despite M's disapproval, enjoys equal friendship with her.
41	H offers friendship to D, declares that M will complete their happy group.	H enters an independent, content life.

Zilia's arrival in Paris marks her first return to female companionship after her long passage across the sea. Her arrival in Déterville's home provides the context for Céline's first intervention. The young woman generously gives the hospitality that her mother does not offer their unexpected guest. She perceives Zilia's need for affectionate reassurance and responds to it:

Enfin, comme si la jeune fille eût deviné mon embarras, après avoir quitté Déterville, elle vint me prendre par la main et me conduisit près d'une fenêtre où nous nous assîmes.  
(203)

Her kindness towards Zilia is interrupted by the stern looks of Madame Déterville, who abruptly has a servant lead the young woman up to a room where the heroine reports being enclosed "presque malgré moi" (204). She feels herself to be "abandonnée de tout le monde," including by Céline, and is not reassured until later that night after the matron goes to bed, when the siblings come to her room. Although she does not understand their words, she does grasp that they have come on a mission of goodwill and friendship and that they are siblings. This is the first in the series of seemingly contradictory encounters between the two young women. Throughout the novel, the closeness of their friendship ebbs and flows, and at times Céline offers practical help when she does not sympathize with the heroine.

The gathering of Déterville, Céline, and Zilia in the latter's room marks an important breakthrough in her sense of security in this new situation. This scene, in which the newcomer is offered hospitality and reassurance, closes the thirteenth letter. The very next letter includes the first of an important element in the novel--Zilia's observations about French society. Her role as the outsider/ social critic is one that has motivated significant scholarship, both for the criticism of a Eurocentric perspective that it represents and for the substance of her observations. There appears to be a link between the reassurance of friendship and solidarity that closes the previous letter and the assumption of this new role.



She has acquired the confidence of the observer, an important transformation from her previous role of the one-who-endures. Up until this point, Zilia has been too traumatized and vulnerable to make analytical observations in her letters about things that do not directly relate to her own immediate emotional stability. Her journey across the sea reveals her as overwhelmed by her circumstances and desperate for any kind of relief from despair and fear, even if that relief came from death.<sup>83</sup> The fourteenth letter shows a young woman who has become secure enough to make observations and comparisons.

Zilia praises Céline's warm personality in the fifteenth letter and describes the activities that the two share. She remarks, "Les manières simples, la bonté naïve, la modeste gayté de Céline feroient volontiers penser qu'elle a été élevée parmi nos Vièrges" (210).

Letter 17 shows how much the friendship has deepened. It is also the first time that Céline needs something from Zilia: her complicity. They are leaving the theater, along with Déterville. Céline's suitor approaches and gives her a letter, greatly upsetting her. Zilia does not know who he is nor understand her friend's reaction. She is about to call Déterville over when she is silenced by Céline. At the moment when her loyalty to brother or sister is tested, Zilia makes her choice: "...[J]'aimai mieux garder mon inquiétude que de désobéir [à Céline]" (219). The young French woman is thus established as having a point of vulnerability, as is the two friends' capacity for collective action. Céline shares the letter with her brother that night, but it is only when and how she chooses. This interaction underscores the fact that the mentor may need a trusted confidante in her protégée.

The nineteenth letter further develops the theme of reciprocity between them and details some of the most significant events in their friendship. When Déterville departs for

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<sup>83</sup> As Carol Sherman notes in "C'est l'insuffisance de notre être qui fait naître l'amitié," Zilia's despair provokes self-destructive incidents on several occasions.

war, both young women are confined to a convent by Madame de Déterville. This episode functions as a leveler in that Céline is no longer in her own home while Zilia struggles to understand and to cope with her new surroundings. Graffigny uses this development in the story to reveal in her heroine strength and agency that had not yet been seen, including the ability to give something to her mentor rather than only benefiting from her.

In the convent, Zilia functions as intermediary for letters between Céline and her beau (whom her mother has forbidden her to see). In the interaction at the theatre, Céline showed need for her friend by asking her to remain quiet about the letter. Here, Zilia plays a more central role; she becomes the essential link for her friend's romance. She transcends the role of guest and becomes integrated into the intimate fabric of her hosts' lives.

This letter also illustrates the complexity and the imperfection of the relationship. The heroine comments on Céline's lack of education and expresses disappointment in her inability to speak of subjects unrelated to herself or her family. She does, however, defend her hostess's right to choose her own husband and to marry, in contrast with the "mère glorieuse et dénaturée" (224) who would enrich her oldest son to the impoverishment of her other two children. The narrator also expresses disappointment in the fact that her friend disapproves of her attachment to Aza. She laments to him:

Confidente perpétuelle [de ses peines], je l'écoute sans ennui, je la plains sans effort, je la console avec amitié; et si ma tendresse réveillée par la peinture de la sienne, me fait chercher à soulager l'oppression de mon coeur en prononçant seulement ton nom, l'impatience et le mépris se peignent sur son visage, elle me conteste ton esprit, tes vertus, et jusqu'à ton amour. (225)

Zilia seems to alternate in this letter between flattering references to Céline and those that are not so. Despite the critical shelter, the opportunities to learn, and the reassurance of companionship that the French woman offers, she falls short of providing the emotional support that her guest craves.

At the same time, the mentor's need for her friend in the exchanging of letters empowers the heroine. Susan Wiltshire emphasizes in *Athena's Disguises* that one thing that mentors can do is provide the protégée the opportunity to give something in return; performing a new role encourages growth. Wiltshire notes that when Athena comes to the door of Telemachus's home, the goddess offers the young man the chance to behave as an adult host, to offer hospitality to a guest by coming to greet her. Although surrounded by the boisterous suitors and feeling completely powerless, he rises to greet the unexpected visitor:

... [H]e saw Athene and went straight to the forecourt, the heart within him scandalized that a guest should still be standing at the doors. He stood beside her and took her by the right hand... and addressed her in winged words: 'Welcome, stranger. You shall be entertained as a guest among us. Afterward, when you have tasted dinner, you shall tell us what your need is. (I.118-124)

Telemachus's own needs do not prevent him from being gracious to another, just as Zilia's uncertainty about her own future does not keep her from providing a service to Céline. In each case, the more secure figure--Athene or Céline--is offered something by the more vulnerable one--Telemachus or Zilia. By providing the opportunity to give in return, the mentors promote growth in the other person.

Déterville's return from war introduces the most tumultuous period in the novel in Zilia's relationships with her hosts. Her rescuer learns to his great disappointment that she does not wish to marry him, but rather hopes for a reunion with Aza. Céline sympathizes with her brother and blames their guest for his sadness. In the twenty-fourth letter, the narrator expresses regret because she believes she has "...perdu l'amitié de Céline" (246). Her sensitivity leads her to fall violently ill with fever as a result of the psychological turmoil, and it is her friend who cares for her physically<sup>84</sup> despite being angry with her. This juxtaposition of negative feelings and caring actions is the most striking example of such

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<sup>84</sup> As discussed, the pattern of a heroine who falls ill from sadness and is nursed to health by a mentor and friend is also present in Scudéry's *Célinde*.

seemingly contradictory sentiments, but it is not the only one. On several occasions, Céline cares for her friend's corporal needs without supporting her emotionally.

Letter 27 opens with Zilia's announcement that Céline has been given the portion of the inheritance of which her mother had intended to deprive her; the text thus emphasizes the heroine's enduring empathy for her friend despite having experienced her anger. Delighted to be able to marry her beloved, Céline is now in much better spirits, however, and Zilia readily welcomes the return of friendship. The newfound material fortune includes a collection of beautiful clothes that the French woman tries to share, but the heroine is insulted. She protests, "Je vous dois la vie, et tout ce que j'ai..." (257). Céline responds with tenderness and understanding; she is not insulted. Zilia recounts, "Cette aimable amie, plus touchée de mes larmes qu'irritée de mes reproches, m'a répondu d'un ton d'amitié..." (257). The new heiress invites Zilia to come live with her after she marries and then presents her with treasures taken from Peru. The young French woman's behavior suggests that her rejection of Zilia's betrothed may have softened somewhat; she declares that the treasures are "de la part d'Aza" (258). Delighted to be able to offer something to someone else, the heroine wishes to give a great portion of her newly-recovered wealth to her benefactor, but Céline stops her:

Que vous êtes injuste, Zilia.... [V]ous voulez faire accepter des richesses immenses à mon frère, vous que l'offre d'une bagatelle offense; rappelez votre équité, si vous voulez en inspirer aux autres. (260)

This rebuke marks a rare occasion on which Céline's guidance takes the form of explicit direction. The narrator recounts with humility, "Ces paroles me frappèrent. Je craignis qu'il n'y eût dans mon action plus d'orgueil et de vengeance que de générosité. Que les vices sont près des vertus. J'avouai ma faute; j'en demandai pardon à Céline..." (260). Here, the mentor's help is not practical help or steady companionship. Rather, she gives explicit

ethical guidance, offering Zilia the traditional maxim of treating others as one wishes to be treated, in the context of underscoring the importance of graciously accepting gifts.

Nevertheless, there are objects among the treasure from Peru that Céline admires. Zilia offers them, and her friend accepts with a good-heartedness that the narrator values as a great gift in itself. The French woman gives more advice when her friend wishes to share part of the bounty with Déterville; she instructs Zilia to write to him in order that the gifts be well-received.

Letter 27 is thus one of the most important in the dynamic between the two women. It shows the return of their friendship and portrays Céline demonstrating depth of affection for Zilia by seeing good in her actions even when experiencing her anger. In the heroine's intervention in Céline's exchange of letters with her suitor, she returned the practical help that had been given her. Here, the mentor reciprocates the generosity of spirit that Zilia has exhibited for her. Graffigny returns both women to material wealth in the same letter. Céline recovers her portion of her family's estate, and Zilia receives the stolen treasure from Peru. For each of them, the good fortune comes not from an outside source, but rather from the return of that which was rightfully hers in the first place.<sup>85</sup> Graffigny juxtaposes the return of inheritance with the return of the women's friendship. The layering of these images of material and emotional abundance emphasizes the friendship as a source of richness and sustenance in both characters' lives.

At Céline's insistence, the heroine reluctantly accompanies her to her country home for the celebration of her marriage. Another important step toward integration into French society, this trip offers Zilia an intimate perspective on the culture that surrounds her and provides an opportunity for her to continue her observations in greater detail and depth.

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<sup>85</sup> C. Sherman writes on the theme of lost-and-found, *Fort-da*, in Graffigny's *Célie* ("Mothers and Daughters").

Much as assurance of her hosts' friendship precedes the first letter of social criticism in Letter 14, the re-commitment to friendship in Letter 27 introduces a new influx of confidence in the narrator's voice. For example, the twenty-ninth letter opens with a sweeping criticism of French ways of life: "Ce n'est pas sans un véritable regret, mon cher Aza, que je passe de l'admiration du génie des François au mépris de l'usage qu'ils en font" (267). Because she is assured of Céline's friendship, the heroine is emotionally secure and directs her attention to society as a whole. When she lacks that assurance, she is unable to focus on anything beyond her own loneliness.

This pattern of the narrator's closing in on herself appears again in the next letter. Letter 30 depicts Zilia as feeling abandoned by her friend among the wedding celebrations: "...[J]e ne jouis plus de l'entretien de Céline. Toute occupée de son nouveaux Epoux, à peine puis-je trouver quelques moments pour lui rendre des devoirs d'amitié" (274). The letter after that continues to show a narrator who is dissatisfied and finding little comfort in friendship. She is bored and irritated, feeling almost resentful toward everyone and everything, "jusqu'à la tendre satisfaction de Céline et de son Epoux..." (275). She seems to feel jealous and superfluous. This development represents a great deal of realism in Graffigny's portrayal. By presenting the ever-virtuous Zilia as capable of feeling irritation at her friend's joy, the author seems to suggest that even sincere friendship may be commingled with less-than-noble sentiments. The author thus differs greatly from Madeleine de Scudéry, who describes close friendships as being those in which the two friends' devotion to one another is never less than ideal.

A particularly important kind of mentoring occurs beginning with the thirty-second letter. At this point, Déterville's disappointment has led to a virtual end of his

communication with Zilia. Aza is on his way to Paris. Céline is now married, and during this period of waiting, the heroine stays with the new couple in their home and spends her days accompanying her friend visiting from house to house:

...[J]e demeure avec Céline dans la maison de son mari, assez éloignée de celle de son frère pour n'être point obligée à le voir à toute heure. Il vient souvent y manger; mais nous menons une vie si agitée, Céline et moi, qu'il n'a pas le loisir de me parler en particulier. (281)

Now that Madame Déterville has died, Céline's sheltering Zilia in her home is particularly important. Without that gift, the heroine would find herself in the uncomfortable position of being *de-facto* a kept woman housed by a man to whom she already finds herself in an unwanted debt of gratitude. These days also represent a kind of apprenticeship in living in French society. As she observes to Aza in Letter 32, it is the first time that she has combined strong understanding of French with exposure to a variety of people: "...[C]'est à present que répandue dans ce qu'on appelle le grand monde, je vois la nation entière, et que je puis l'examiner sans obstacles" (282). The experience of going visiting is an exposure to society that she had never had before, an opportunity to sharpen her critical thinking and powers of observation, and perhaps most importantly, the chance to acquire a level of self confidence that allows her to see both the good and bad in French society. Earlier in the novel, her social criticism vacillated between naïve admiration and wholesale condemnation. Here, for the first time, her perspective has matured so that, as the social equal of Céline, Zilia feels secure enough to see the patterns of behavior around her with neither fear nor scorn, but rather with objectivity and a good deal of understanding. After having indicted the frivolousness around her, Zilia writes, "Ne crois pas pour cela, mon cher Aza, qu'en général les Français soient nés méchants..." (283). Indeed, she seems almost to pity those of whom she writes, "Enfin... chez la plupart d'entre eux les vices sont artificiels comme les

vertus” (284). Through this representation of her narrator’s development, Graffigny seems to suggest the importance of steady companionship to promote individual intellectual growth.

The experience of being Céline’s companion and thereby gaining authentic entry into aristocratic society is one that Déterville never could have offered Zilia. Due to the circumstances of their meeting, there would always be an underlying sense of her being his battle prize. The heroine’s functioning socially as an independent being was therefore something that she could do only at the side of another woman, and Céline offers her this.

It seems unlikely that without the apprenticeship beside Céline, Zilia would have had the self-confidence, the understandings of cultural subtleties, or perhaps even the desire to maintain a home of her own and there be mistress and hostess. Thanks to this period of being challenged yet protected, Zilia gains not only the practical means--the house purchased on her behalf by Déterville and Céline--to live an independent life, but also the knowledge and strength to carry it out.

Zilia’s further observations about French society comprise the thirty-third and thirty-fourth letters. Letter 34 is a famous denunciation of the treatment of women; added in the 1752 edition, it has been for some editors the deciding factor concerning which edition to publish (Smith). This letter serves as a point of reference that establishes Graffigny as a feminist author and the novel as a feminist text. For the third time, Zilia’s capacity for observation takes on new life immediately following an important period of growth in her friendship with Céline.

The next event is the presentation of Zilia’s new home by her mentor and Déterville. It is Céline who announces to her friend, “...[I]l est très-vrai que cette terre et cette maison vous appartiennent” (301). The young French woman understands what makes the gift of



such value; for Zilia it offers “une vie indépendante” (301). The narrator later describes the acquisition of the house as affording her a “nouvelle dignité” (302). The home represents far more than shelter or comfort. She is no longer the perpetual guest; she can interact with her former hosts when she chooses to do so. Céline thus performs and articulates the final act of every mentor: she sets her charge on a path of independence. Although both she and her brother cooperated to purchase the house, the sister acts as the guide and mistress of ceremonies, showing her friend around and presenting the home. Overcome with joy, the heroine writes, “Je faisais à Céline des caresses qu’elle me rendait avec la même tendresse...” (301). This description of joyful affection between the two women recalls the happy reunion of Demeter and Persephone. Much as the mother in that myth experiences joy despite knowing that her daughter would leave again for the underworld,<sup>86</sup> Céline embraces Zilia in a renewed friendship that is deepened, not destroyed, by the guest’s rebellious decision to resist marrying Déterville. In both stories, the moment of reunion is one in which the mentor accepts the protégée on new terms.

When Aza arrives in Paris, Céline plays hostess to Aza and again to Zilia, who has returned to the family home to meet Aza in a location not compromising to her honor. Céline offers “[du] bon traitement” although it is because of her guest that her brother has left. This again shows her capacity to offer support even when she is less than pleased with her friend’s actions. The reunion with Aza is not the one for which the heroine had longed, and Zilia is devastated. Between Letters 38 and 39, she attempts to take her own life. Céline again nurses her back to health, an act that the despairing heroine resents. She writes to Déterville,

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<sup>86</sup> Agha-Jaffar speculates that Persephone’s eating the pomegranate was a more deliberate action than her account to her mother implies (Chapter 3, “Persephone: Moving Beyond Victimization,” *Demeter and Persephone* 36-55).

“[V]ous ignorez l’état dont les cruels soins de Céline viennent de me tirer” (315). Her response resembles that of Scudéry’s Célinte, who resents the abbess’s saving her from a threatening snake.

Gratitude returns to the heroine’s spirit in the following letter, as she informs Déterville: “Les soins de votre aimable soeur m’ont rendu la santé” (317). This letter also emphasizes the characters’ differences of opinion. As soon as Zilia’s health permits it, she wishes to leave the home where she experienced the grave disappointment of Aza’s rejection: she wishes to retreat to her own new home. She does so, but it is not “sans peine qu’[elle obtient] de Céline la permission” (317-18) to go there. Once Zilia is settled into her house, her friend continues to visit her there despite disapproving (like many of Graffigny’s readers) of a woman’s living there alone. The narrator’s invitation to Déterville to come and relish the joys of friendship invokes his sister as part of their little group: “Céline, en nous partageant sa tendresse, répandra dans nos entretiens la gayté qui pourroit y manquer: que nous restera-t-il à désirer?” (321-322) The heroine envisions a continuing role in her life for her mentor, as her companion and her friend.

#### Conclusions: Female Mentoring in *Lettres d’une Péruvienne*

Céline generously collaborates with her brother to help buy the house for Zilia using the recovered treasure from Peru yet disapproves of her living there alone. She continues faithfully visiting her friend, implying that agreement is not a condition for friendship. Graffigny portrays a relationship in which critical guidance and support are given and received despite disagreement and occasional disappointment. The narrator’s gracious forgiveness of her friend’s shortcomings seems to be both complete and genuine. The

constancy of Céline's presence--her never-failing gifts of shelter, accompaniment, and physical care--help Zilia to develop the security that in turn promotes the very maturity with which she forgives her friend's shortcomings.<sup>87</sup> Her relationship with the young French woman provides a physical haven, an apprenticeship in French socializing, practical support that promotes significant personal growth, and finally, her own home.

While the young French woman fails at many moments to understand Zilia, she nevertheless continues to provide her with important support that is emotional as well as practical. When Zilia's health is in danger, Céline nurses her back to life. She provides hospitality when it is needed. Perhaps as important as her gifts, however, are the things she asks of Zilia. She needs the heroine's complicity, solace, and cooperation. By providing her friend with the opportunity to offer her these gifts, she encourages the narrator's development, before ultimately opening the door for her independence in the form of her own home.

### Female Mentoring in *Cénie*

#### Story

Like *Lettres d'une Péruvienne*, *Cénie* also tells the story of a young woman who sees her sense of home and security disappear and is in sore need of a faithful companion. The heroine is heiress to an impressive fortune and the only child of a widower, Dorimond. Also in the household are her two cousins, sons of her father's deceased sister.<sup>88</sup> The older of the

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<sup>87</sup> My view contrasts with that of Janet Todd, who sees Céline's moments of failing Zilia as definitive in their relationship, declaring that the heroine gives up on friendship with women and tries instead to seek all emotional support in a marriage with Aza (311-312).

<sup>88</sup> In "The Philosopher as Tramp and Female in the Writings of Graffigny," Chloe Hogg notes that the brief mention of this dead woman, one who "n'a pas pu survivre au désastre de ses affaires, à la perte de son mari" (1.2), reinforces Graffigny's emphasis on women's financial precariousness (7).

two, Méricourt, hopes to gain Dorimond's fortune by marrying Cénie. He does not love her, but intends to force the engagement, first by appealing to her father and then by trying to blackmail her into accepting his proposal. The younger son, Clerval, loves the heroine and is loved by her. The questions of who will marry whom function as triggers that reveal a variety of secrets known to no one but Méricourt, who cleverly worked his way into the confidence of Mélisse, Dorimond's deceased wife. Along with the rest of the characters, we learn that Cénie is really not Dorimond and Mélisse's child, but that Mélisse, desperate to give her husband a child, passed off as her own the infant of an impoverished woman. The scandal is furthered by the subsequent revelation that Cénie's mother is not unknown, but is her governess Orphise. The heroine thus receives consecutive blows to her identity first by concluding that she has no family at all and then by believing that her modest birth permanently excludes her from her home, from the man she thought to be her father, and from Clerval, whom she had hoped to marry.

The latter revelation is distressing not because Cénie looks down upon Orphise, but because of the second layer of turbulence that it causes. As much as Dorimond loves Cénie, the revelation of her birth leads him to conclude with regret that it is now out of the question for her to marry one of his nephews. Because people in Ancien Régime France were defined by their *état*, their place in society, Orphise's job as a governess was understood as being far more than merely what she did; rather, it was seen as who she was--a servant. For this reason, Clerval's friend Dorsainville, who has himself been well-acquainted with misfortune, tries to dissuade his friend from marrying Cénie once she is revealed to be Orphise's daughter. The two women are socially redeemed and Cénie found suitable as a wife for Clerval when it is discovered that Orphise is actually the long-lost spouse of Dorsainville and

therefore also a member of the upper class. The play concludes with the reunion of Orphise and Dorsainville, the engagement of Cénie and Cleval, and a promise to Dorimond that they will maintain close ties with him.

### Mentor

Table 6.2 lists each occurrence of Orphise's presence on stage. Also included are scenes in Act I, in which she is discussed, as well as her absence from Act III. In the table, Orphise is represented by *M*, mentor, and Cénie by *H*, heroine.

Table 6.2: Functions of Orphise (M) in Mentoring Cénie (H)

Act, Scene	Movement in plot regarding Orphise (M)	Result for Cénie (H)
I, 2*	M evoked as opinionated by Méricourt, Lisette	H is guided by a strong force
I, 3*	M presented as of high moral quality by Dorimond (D)	H's mentor perceived as both strong and moral.
I, 5*	Lisette declares hatred for M.	Opposition between villains and M is reinforced; H seems caught between them.
II, 1	First appearance of M and H together. The latter recounts her conversation with D, and M counsels her to obey her father. H reveals love for Clerval.	M's fierce love for H established, along with her tough advice. H requests guidance. M takes on the role of stand-in, agreeing to talk to Clerval. H offers reciprocity in her concern for M.
II, 2	M tells Clerval to forget H, then relents and agrees to speak with Dorimond.	M acts as H's double by testing Clerval and thereby protects her from heartbreak or dishonor.
II, 3	M is rebuked by Dorimond and told to stay out of family affairs.	Dorimond's command threatens to separate the women.
II, 5	M declares she will remain close to H	H is assured of M's commitment to stay with her.
III*	H faces blackmail, loss of familial identity, and loss of love. M is absent throughout the act	H navigates the most harrowing moments of the play without her guide.
IV, 1	H and M are reunited; M declares that she will always remain with H	M becomes H's sole source of comfort and stability.
IV, 3	M is revealed as H's mother	H rejoices, then is humiliated by the reactions of Dorimond and Méricourt.
IV, 4	M forgives H's class consciousness and proposes they leave together.	H is humbled by M's graciousness.
IV, 5	Clerval still wants to marry H. M refuses, but asks him to procure for them a guide to a convent	M has assumed responsibility for decisions for both women, acting as both parent (authority) and stand-in (double).
V, 3	Dorimond suggests the marriage of the young couple. M refuses.	The dynamics of power between the women are now completely reversed.
V, 4	M reveals that H's father still lives, and that she must not therefore consent to a marriage for her.	M appears less as wielder-of-authority over Cénie than keeper of it, for her true father.
V, 5	Dorsainville is revealed as Orphise's husband, H's father. H and Clerval can now marry.	H regains all that she had lost--familial identity, love, social stability--and has her mentor/ mother at her side.

\* Orphise is not on stage. In the three scenes indicated in Act I, she is discussed. In Act III, she is neither present nor discussed, but her absence is significant.

The first mention of Orphise reveals that she has very strong opinions regarding her charge. Lisette tells Méricourt: "...Madame la Gouvernante, avec ses manieres poliment impérieuses, m'écarte de sa pupille autant qu'il est possible" (I, 2). Later in the scene, Lisette explicitly warns the villain, concerning Orphise, "...[E]lle ne vous aime pas." As Gethner emphasizes, Méricourt is clearly the villain of the play (Les 'pièces nouvelles de Graffigny'" 47), and just as Graffigny made a daring choice in keeping him unrepentant to the end, the author also challenged dramatic convention by placing the highest moral authority in the drama in Orphise rather than in Dorimond, the father of the family (Gethner 48). By positioning her in opposition to Méricourt, Graffigny situates the governess as the strong force of good in the play.

In the scene that follows, Méricourt expresses to Dorimond interest in marrying Cénie. The paternal figure is about to go make that proposition to the young woman when the suitor interjects that perhaps they ought not to speak of it in front of Orphise, citing the danger of including servants in one's secrets. Dorimond defends the governess's discretion and character: "Tu ne connais pas Orphise. C'est une femme d'un mérite supérieur, et qui n'a rien de la bassesse de son état." Before she comes onto the stage, Orphise is thus established as a woman of great strength, discerning judgment, and of whom Méricourt seems to be afraid. In Méricourt and Lisette's second scene of scheming, the opposition between the two of them as villains and Orphise therefore as a heroine is reinforced as Lisette declares, "...[J]e hais complètement Madame Orphise" (I, 5).

The second act opens with a scene between the heroine and her governess that immediately establishes the intimacy between them, Orphise's sensitivity to her charge, and her emotional investment in Cénie's well-being. She asks, "Qu'avez-vous Cénie? Vous

quittez votre père les yeux remplis de larmes.” Her next question underscores that her concern is accompanied by expectations for appropriate behavior: “Auriez-vous eu le malheur de lui déplaire?” When Orphise learns the topic of the young woman’s discussion with her father--a marriage to Méricourt proposed by Dorimond to which the heroine objects--the governess’s life-hardened perspective becomes very evident. Orphise’s fiercely intense love for Cénie, increasingly revealed throughout the play, does not lead her to want to help the young woman fulfill her every wish. Rather, her own experience of deeply loving a husband who was then forced to leave her has made Orphise severely pragmatic, such that she believes, “Hélas! C’est quelquefois un bonheur de n’avoir pour son époux qu’une tendresse mesurée” (II,1). The young woman’s response underscores the great difference in life experience between the two and the consequent difference between Cénie’s optimism and Orphise’s skepticism. Cénie counters, “Je me suis faite une idée différente du mariage.” As Orphise continues to speak, we see that her desire to protect Cénie from love is born not from harshness but rather from her own wounds: “L’expérience peut seule nous découvrir les peines inséparables d’un attachement trop tendre” (II, 1).

Cénie’s response offers the first glimpse of reciprocity between the two. The young woman perceives that her governess may no longer be speaking in general terms but rather from personal experience: “Vous vous attendrissez: ah, ma bonne! Auriez-vous éprouvé des maux dont vous semblez si pénétrée?” Although Orphise tries to dismiss her charge’s concerns by claiming that her emotion came only from fears for Cénie, the young woman persists, “Vous croyez que je ne mérite pas encore votre confiance?” A few exchanges later, the young woman’s declaration of how unhappy she is at the prospect of marrying Méricourt leads Orphise to sigh, “Vous m’affligez.” The scene thus shows



tremendous affection and empathy between the two. In the midst of contemplating being forced to marry against her will, Cénie is interested in hearing the story of Orphise's past, and the governess is saddened by her charge's despair, although she condemns Cénie's reluctance to obey her father.

This scene also portrays Orphise as confidante and mentor to her charge. As the heroine observes earlier in the scene, the governess does not confide her secrets. She does, however, ask Cénie for hers. Upon hearing that the young woman has chosen the man whom she wishes to marry, a dismayed Orphise cries, "Quoi Cénie! Vous avez disposé de votre coeur?" This mentor's method of acquiring information is certainly more straightforward than that chosen by Madame Argante in Marivaux's *La mère confidante*, who asks her daughter to treat her as a confidante in order to learn the young woman's secrets.<sup>89</sup> Cénie neither hides anything from Orphise nor delays in responding to her.

The governess does not tell her charge what she would like to hear. Orphise's love and loyalty are very strong, but she does not possess the means to make everything better. What she does have to offer is experience of the world Cénie is about to enter, and that wisdom is the gift that she reluctantly passes on. Like Nausicaa in the *Odyssey* or Metaneira's daughters in the *Hymn to Demeter*, who shared their insiders' knowledge with Odysseus and with Demeter, Orphise is not a wielder of power, but rather one who points the way. She knows that wealthy patriarch Dorimond expects his daughter to accept his choice of a husband for her. The governess advises, "Il est permis tout au plus à une jeune fille bien née d'avouer sa repugnance, et jamais son penchant" (II, 1).

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<sup>89</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter, Marivaux's choice of topic and title for his play beg the question of to what extent it is possible to be both mother and confidante, or whether the roles are mutually exclusive.

Another element of the mentoring relationship found in this scene is that the protégée explicitly requests guidance. David Clutterbuck's essay "What About Mentee Competences?" (72-82 Clutterbuck and Lane) highlights the importance of behavior in the one mentored and suggests that a protégé who articulates goals and questions for the mentor facilitates the process. Cénie does that in this scene. Recognizing the difference between her father's intentions for her life and her desires, she asks Orphise for guidance: "Epargnez-moi les reproches. Je n'ai besoin que de conseils" (II, 1). She will not be deterred when the governess at first answers that the young woman will not like her advice. Cénie persists, "Quoi, Madame, vous refuseriez de me conduire dans un temps..." (The ellipses here and on page 26 are Graffigny's.) Orphise then tells Cénie that she must obey her father and offers her support in making such a difficult passage: "...[C]'est de ce moment que vous avez besoin de moi, pour vous aider à soutenir avec courage le sacrifice que vous allez faire de votre goût à la vertu."

The conclusion of this important scene between the two women reveals another aspect of their relationship--the mentor as double<sup>90</sup> or stand-in for the protégée. A mentor may play that role at the protégée's side, as Hekate did for Demeter by accompanying her to Mt. Olympus to inquire about Persephone, or she may go in the other's place, as Orphise does here. Cénie explicitly requests this help. When the governess predicts that the heroine will learn in time about the hypocrisy of men like Clerval, the young woman issues a challenge that is also a request: "Eh bien, Madame! parlez-lui vous-même. Si vous lui trouvez la légèreté dont vous le croyez capable, quelque aversion que je sente pour le parti qu'on me propose, j'obéirai aveuglément" (II, 1). Here Orphise is asked to act on her

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<sup>90</sup> Sherman observes the function of a double in the relationship between Céline and Zilia in *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* ("C'est l'insuffisance" 60).

charge's behalf. She protects Cénie by testing the sincerity of her beau, in an effort to shield her from potential disappointment or dishonor. The function is the same as that performed by Madame Argante in *La mère confidante* when, in the guise of an aunt, she interrogates her daughter's young man. An important difference is that Orphise holds no power because at this point in the play she is not known as the young woman's mother.

Orphise tests Clerval in the next scene. In her twelve lines, she gives the young man no indication that she might sympathize with him until the eleventh one, in which she suggests that she might speak with Dorimond about the question of Cénie's future marriage: "L'honnêteté de vos sentiments me touche, Monsieur; j'ai quelque crédit sur l'esprit de votre oncle, je n'abuserai point de sa confiance, j'emploierai seulement...." She thus shifts from assessing the suitor's qualities to suggesting that she might act as an advocate for his interests. The governess insists that she promises nothing but to learn Dorimond's level of commitment to Méricourt as a groom for his daughter. It appears, nevertheless, that Clerval has won the governess's initial acceptance. She carries out the role of protector against the threats of heartbreak or, much worse, lost reputation, by speaking with Clerval. Once the young man tentatively passes Orphise's examination, she takes on the role of advocate. Her actions recall those of Athena, pleading the case of Odysseus before the great patriarch of the gods, Zeus. Much as the goddess's presentation to her father, "But the heart in me is torn for the sake of Odysseus" was motivated by deeply-felt empathy, Orphise approaches the formidable task of questioning the actions of the patriarch because she is moved by the plight of those for whom she argues.

Before she can carry out her plan, however, she finds herself rebuked by Dorimond. As Gethner observes, it appears that the father of the family has succumbed to a bad mood in

this scene (“Les ‘pieces nouvelles’ de Graffigny” 45), as Dorimond accuses both Clerval and Orphise of deceiving him. In his reprimand of Orphise, it is clear to what extent he views Cénie as childlike and unlikely to possess a will of her own. Having noted the look of disappointment on the young woman’s face when he proposed marriage to Méricourt to her, he blames not Cénie but the influence of the governess, which he perceives as meddling. So sure is he of his lowered opinion of Orphise that he directs her to no longer give counsel to her charge: “Enfin, Madame, pour le peu de temps qu’elle aura besoin de vous, je vous prie de ne plus vous mêler de nos affaires” (II, 3). Dorimond’s inscription of himself and Cénie as the nucleus of a family--*nous*--and Orphise as on its outskirts--*vous*--is deeply ironic.<sup>91</sup> As Arguelles observes, Orphise does not remain safely on the periphery of the family but rather replaces her master as Cénie’s parent and center of the primary family unit (33-34). More generous than he, when the final scenes reveal Orphise as Cénie’s mother and an aristocrat, she graciously welcomes him as a continuing presence in their lives, rather than telling him to stay out of “nos affaires.” In the face of the humiliating blow, Orphise does not concede to despair or spite. Rather, she resolutely answers, “Je dois vous obéir, Monsieur, vous serez satisfait.” It seems that her humble response comes not only from her strong sense of pride but also from the knowledge that provoking Dorimond further will only strengthen his resolve to keep her away from Cénie. Her soliloquy in Scene 5 confirms that reading: “Mais plus on m’éloigne de Cénie, plus mes conseils lui sont nécessaires. Sans offenser Dorimond, rendons à sa fille ce qu’exigent de moi sa confiance et mon amitié. On n’est pas tout à fait malheureux, quand il reste du bien à faire.” Orphise acts here as self-sacrificing mentor--one whose intervention in her protégée’s life is undertaken entirely for

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<sup>91</sup> Arguelles notes Dorimond’s displacement from the central position of power to the margins of the family (33-34).

the latter's good. Her actions require her to set her pride aside. She cannot argue with her master and defend herself if she is to remain close to Cénie. Graffigny thus presents a mentor who is a mother but, without that title, is not automatically granted influence on her daughter's life. She must rather fight to retain a position close enough to the young woman to help her. In "Mathilde," the heroine's mother must also wage an uphill struggle to exert influence on her daughter's life. Her own impending death and her husband's opposing priorities place her at the mercy of her daughter's tenderness, much as Orphise must please Dorimond in order to be near Cénie.

Orphise is mentioned several times in the first act and is very present on stage in Acts II, IV, and V. She does not appear at all, however, in Act III, when Méricourt executes his plan of attack. He makes vague threats to Cénie, "Vous vous repentirez peut-être dans un moment..." in order to acquire her willingness to marry him, and when she refuses to yield to him, shows her the letter from Mélisse that exposes her as an unknown entity. This dismantling of her familial identity is immediately followed by a pathetic scene of *adieux* between the heroine and Clerval, in which her wish to keep her new shame hidden from him when breaking off their relationship ends in a tearful admission of love. The pattern in mentoring relationships in which the protégée is with the mentor before a difficult passage, is separated from her guide, and then enjoys a reunion, is one that figures prominently in the myth of Demeter and Persephone.<sup>92</sup> As Agha-Jaffar underscores, Persephone's experiences away from her mother seem to have had a maturing effect even though the leave-taking was against her will (43-55). Act III of *Cénie* similarly constitutes the heroine's underworld. Her

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<sup>92</sup> Mary Louise Lord sees this pattern as an important link between the *Hymn to Demeter* and the *Odyssey* and the *Illiad*, as described in her article "Withdrawal and Return: An Epic Story Pattern in the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* and in the Homeric Poems," *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, Helene P. Foley, 181-189.

previous concept of self and her hopes for the future are swept away in two brief scenes, and Orphise is absent from them. By structuring the play in this manner, Graffigny shows a young heroine who is strong enough to withstand enormous pressure:<sup>93</sup> she might easily have accepted Méricourt's marriage proposal in order to safeguard her social status or have proposed to Clerval a staged *enlèvement*.<sup>94</sup> With constancy that recalls that of her mentor, the heroine declares, "[L]a vérité fera toujours ma loi" (IV, 3). This show of force on Cénie's part in Orphise's absence suggests that the governess has imparted to her charge impressive strength and the ability to respond to a potentially crippling revelation with grace and dignity. That is, we see in part the results of all that Orphise has already done.

The women are reunited in Act IV, and Graffigny wastes no time in announcing the persistence of their affection and the fact that their reunification will be a central theme in this act. The bond is emphasized in particular because they appear alone. Orphise greets Cénie, "Oui, je vous attendais. Venez, courageuse Cénie, venez jouir dans mes bras de la victoire que vous remportez sur vous-même" (IV, 1). The stage direction implicit in that line indicates that the characters physically embrace at this moment. The governess's aim is not only to assure the young woman of her enduring affection, but also to affirm her choice to tell Dorimond the truth. Orphise offers a maxim:<sup>95</sup> "La gloire est la recompense de la vertu." So intense is the governess's commitment to strength that she does not give Cénie much room to pity herself, declaring, "C'est dans l'excès du malheur qu'il faut ranimer son courage: souvent les plaintes amollissent." In response to this axiom, the heroine exhibits a

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<sup>93</sup> Gethner's introduction to the play in *Femmes dramaturges* underscores this strength of character (324).

<sup>94</sup> As discussed in Chapter 2, Haase-Dubosc shows that abduction was a frequent marital strategy precisely because the degree to which a woman willed it could never really be established.

<sup>95</sup> Gethner notes Orphise's penchant for maxims ("Les 'pieces nouvelles'" 46).

rare moment of crumbling. Overwhelmed by the news that she is not the child of Dorimond and Mélisse and before learning that her mother is Orphise, Cénie laments,

Eh quoi! Me seraient-elles interdites, [mes plaintes], quand le ciel me ravit ce qu'il accorde aux plus vils mortels? Je ne prononcerai plus les tendres noms de père et de mère. Je sens anéantir dans mon coeur la confiance qu'ils inspirent. (IV, 1)

In addition to the distress that one might feel faced with the loss of one's familial identity, easily understood by readers of any era, it is important to recall the primordial importance of family in Ancien Régime French society that compounds the undoing of Cénie's sense of self. Not knowing her mother and father makes of Cénie a non-person, one wholly outside the realm of organized society. At this moment of desolation, Cénie feels a loss of guidance in addition to that of identity. She continues, "Plus de soutien, plus de défenseur, plus de guide à mes volontés! Mon indépendance m'épouvante...." She then turns to Orphise, asking, "Madame, m'abandonnerez-vous?" (IV.1).

This question and the governess's response constitute what we may see as the heart of the play: "Non, ma chère Cénie; vous perdez beaucoup, mais il vous reste un coeur. Si ma vie vous est nécessaire, elle me deviendra intéressante." Arguelles convincingly argues that the relationship between the two women represents the play's driving force (22). In this sense, although Act V will bring resolution to Cénie's life, the most important question--whether or not she and Orphise will be able to resist the circumstances that would pull them apart--has been answered.<sup>96</sup> Although it has not yet been revealed that Orphise is actually Cénie's mother, the older woman is nonetheless committed to staying by her charge's side. Not only is she willing to accompany her, come what may, but helping the young woman

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<sup>96</sup> Christine Roulston addresses the issues of loyalty between female friends and the threat that their friendships posed to centers of power in her article "Separating the Inseparables: Female Friendship and Its Discontents in Eighteenth-Century France." As discussed in Chapter 4, the loyalty in Scudéry's *Célinde* between the heroine and the abbess represented a form of resistance to the king and his agents.

gives meaning to her life. Cénie also articulates at this time the definitive role that her governess has had in her upbringing. Orphise is complimenting her charge's character, and the young woman replies, "Ils [mes sentiments] sont tels que vous les avez fait naître: je ne suis que votre ouvrage."<sup>97</sup>

Cénie, Orphise, Dorimond, and Méricourt are all present in the scene in which the truth of Cénie's birth is revealed. Mélisse's letter underscores the desperate circumstances in which Orphise had found herself. The note declares, "Votre mère vous croit morte.... Informée de l'extrême misère où elle était réduite, je l'en tirai pour vous servir de gouvernante. C'est dans ses mains que je vous remets" (IV, 3). A joyful embrace between mother and daughter is quickly followed by the humiliating reactions of Dorimond and Méricourt. Dorimond faints in dismay that the young girl he has known as a daughter was born in poverty; Méricourt spitefully tells Cénie, "Vous n'êtes plus rien ici."

From this point forward, Orphise's actions as mentor are undertaken with the consciousness of being Cénie's mother. The servant-mistress dynamic has disappeared and has been reversed. It is now Orphise who takes the lead in making decisions for the two of them. For a moment, Cénie is overcome by the disdain that Dorimond and Méricourt have just shown her: "...[J]e ne saurais supporter le mépris." She quickly recovers her resolve, however, bolstered by Orphise's unwavering loyalty and even her generous understanding of Cénie's feelings of shame: "Ces mouvements sont naturels, ma chère enfant...."

The newly-revealed mother then proposes a plan of action: an honorable flight to a convent. Although they now know that they are mother and daughter, Orphise's language almost seems to suggest equality. She advises, "Allons, allons chercher un asile où nous

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<sup>97</sup> Since Mélisse, Cénie's presumed mother, has died only recently, this proclamation highlights Arguelles's question regarding the role of the mother when a governess is present.



puissions être malheureuses sans rougir” (IV, 4). In the scenes that follow, she demonstrates acceptance of the role of parent and the authority that accompanies it. Here, though, her invitation recalls the sense of equity seen in Demeter and Persephone’s interaction after that daughter’s return from the underworld.<sup>98</sup>

The final scene of Act IV again features Orphise and Clerval together. When they met in Act II, she undertook to dissuade him from marrying Cénie in an effort to preserve harmony in the household. In this encounter, the threat of the heroine’s marrying Méricourt has disappeared, and Orphise knows that she is her daughter, a fact that Clerval does not know. He announces his desire to marry Cénie and is not deterred by the revelation of her birth. Orphise, now with the authority to make decisions regarding the heroine’s future, does not answer directly, but calls upon the young man’s services to guide the two women to a convent. This request constitutes another example of her functioning as a double for Cénie. In contrast with her previous encounter with Clerval, the mother/ governess is also acting as an authority figure. She shows the combination of humility and pride seen throughout the play: she will not stay in a house where there is ambiguity about her status, but she will request the help that she needs to protect her daughter and herself. As a mentor, she exhibits the capacity to recognize what she cannot do for her charge but must ask of others. In this behavior, we can see an example of Gill Lane’s concept of a “door-opener”--one who helps another by creating opportunities with third parties (“A Quantitative View” 61; 65).

The third scene of the final act demonstrates how central Orphise has become to the action of the play.<sup>99</sup> The woman who was told in Act II to no longer meddle in the family’s

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<sup>98</sup> Agha-Jaffar makes this observation (*Demeter and Persephone* 31-32).

<sup>99</sup> Arguelles notes the character’s increasing dominance (22).

affairs now makes the crucial decisions. Clerval, desperate to keep the women from leaving, encourages Orphise to reveal that she is in fact not of the birth that her job would suggest. Although she asks no pity from Dorimond, she does sufficiently indicate the hardships she has endured to lead him to propose that the young couple marry after all. The question of class is central because, as discussed,<sup>100</sup> families were defined by their *état*, their place in society. Because Clerval is Dorimond's nephew, the social class of the young man's wife will affect the older man's status and that of all present and future members of his *maison*. Orphise will not accept the pity implicit in approving the young people's marriage *despite* her own ambiguous social status. She crushes the hopes of Dorimond, Clerval (and Cénie), by refusing the patriarch's offer and insisting that she and her daughter proceed with their plans to flee to a convent. Cénie is silent throughout the scene except for the opening line, in which she thanks Dorimond for raising her and bids him farewell. The mentor is now functioning as much more than a double or advocate. Rather, she has become the *porte-parole*, speaking for her charge even when the latter is present. The mother's revelation that Cénie's father is still living, however, constitutes her reason for refusing to agree to the wedding between Clerval and the heroine that everyone seems to want. She is reserving the privilege of making that decision for the young woman's father. By taking this position, she appears more as keeper-of-power than wielder-of-it.

In the final scene, Graffigny allows Clerval's friend Dorsainville and Orphise to meet, at which time each recognizes the long-lost spouse in the other. The governess's redemption as a member of the aristocracy is also that of Cénie. The revelation allows the young people to marry as social equals. Orphise's resistance to blessing the union before this moment, despite Clerval's and Dorimond's willingness to overlook an apparent class

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<sup>100</sup> See, for example, Pierre Petot, "La famille en France sous l'Ancien Régime."

difference, might appear to be a stubborn refusal to see her daughter happy. Consideration of her past, however, suggests a different reading. She has known others' scorn in her role of servant, and she has experienced painful separation from a beloved spouse. Using her experiences as background, she wishes her charge to marry only when she feels assured that the young woman will enjoy the full respect of her husband, only when there is no doubt of her suitability as a wife. We saw Madame Argante in *La mère confidente* also trying to protect her daughter from a spouse's potential scorn. In Marivaux's play, the mother fears that her daughter's dishonorable action of agreeing to an elopement urged by an eager young lover might later be judged harshly by the same man. Here, Orphise seems to fear that while the young Clerval is willing to overlook an apparent class difference, his ardor might later turn to pity and disdain. This governess and mother thus protects, defends, and comforts her charge consistently, using the wisdom gained from her own life and her love for Cénie as resources.

#### Conclusion: Female Mentoring in *Cénie*

In *Cénie*, as the heroine faces uncertainty about her past, present and future, her source of constancy is Orphise. The governess/mother is at times a comforter, a counselor, and an advocate. When there seems to be no alternative but for the young woman to retreat to a convent, Orphise does not hesitate to declare that she will accompany her there. In these roles, we see many of the functions of a mentor or "threshold figure" (Felson-Rubin 89).

Athena acts as a comforter to Telemachus's mother Penelope in the *Odyssey* after the young man has left on his voyage to search for his father. The goddess tells the distressed mother that her son is safe and is accompanied by a wise and capable guide. Similarly, when

Cénie finds herself distressed by her father's proposal of Méricourt as a spouse, Orphise is touched by her charge's tears and seeks to comfort her. Her reassurance is tender; she is not only sensitive to what is best for Cénie in the long run, but also concerned for her emotional well-being at that moment.

Like Céline in Graffigny's novel, Orphise does not always agree with her charge. The relationship between Cénie and her mother is complex and nuanced. The older woman does not share her charge's perspective concerning the right course to take regarding accepting a marriage proposal, yet she is sympathetic to her tears. She comforts her, tries to change her mind, and then, seeing the young woman's obstinacy in the matter, agrees to examine the young suitor herself. Here Orphise relates to the young woman very much as her protégée in the literal sense of the word, protecting her from a potential broken heart or a ruined reputation, by gauging the fidelity of her beau. Orphise tests Clerval, and his responses lead her to engage herself in a second mission on Cénie's behalf, which is to plead the case of the young couple to Dorimond.

Despite her dedication to Cénie, Orphise cannot protect the young woman from every misfortune. When Méricourt maliciously reveals the secrets of the heroine's birth to all, Cénie feels that she must retreat in shame to a convent. Her guide then offers the young woman the one remaining resource that she can: her own faithful presence.

Cénie experiences a psychological and social fall from grace followed by re-establishment. Whereas Zilia travels (against her will) from Peru to the French coast, then into Paris and back out into the countryside while she undergoes dramatic psychological

turmoil, Cénie's journey occurs within the confines of her parental home.<sup>101</sup> The young woman's uprooting is nonetheless very real, and she is able to maintain a sense of herself largely through the unfailing support of Orphise. When the governess is revealed as the heroine's mother, the one who begins the play as servant to the other finishes as her superior. Despite these dramatic shifts in power, Orphise's loyalty and dedication to Cénie is steadfast without being obsequious; the older woman is not afraid to censor her charge's intentions. Orphise offers the constancy of companionship when nothing else in Cénie's world is stable.

### Conclusion

Both Céline and Orphise function as mentors to the respective heroines of the stories. While they function in direct contact with their protégées and on their behalf, there is a difference in the patterns of the relationships. Graffigny's portrayal of relationships in which one with more experience, status, or power helps another who is less established suggests that she saw such bonds as vital to women's well-being. Both Zilia and Cénie grew up in privileged domains. One was a princess, destined to rule over her people and marry the prince, while the other was raised as the cherished heiress to her father's fortune. They both hoped to make the transition to womanhood with ease, amid celebration and fanfare. Like Graffigny herself, however, these characters find that all is not as they had hoped it would be. Before continuing to the next stage of life, each is stripped of the familial identity that had made her secure and must plan for survival without fortune or privilege, and bear the loss of a cherished love. The bridge that the author inserts into each of these crises to allow the heroines to take the next step is a female ally. Céline and Orphise are unwaveringly present

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<sup>101</sup> This plot distinction should probably be attributed to the different genres. Graffigny took great advantage of the unlimited freedom of movement in time and space that the novel offers, whereas it seems that she respected in her play the trilogy of unified space, time, and theme that had been so emphasized during the classical period.

and in each text provide stability in the moments of greatest tension. Unlike the males in the two stories--Déterville in the novel and Dorimond in the play--these female mentors do not possess the power to change the facts of the situations. Déterville can write to his well-connected friends and arrange for Aza to come to Paris, and Dorimond can say who will inherit his substantial fortune. The gift that the female characters have to offer is solidarity amid terrifying uncertainty. By assigning this striking difference to her characters' functions, Graffigny thus underscores the great inequality between men and women in eighteenth-century France, the need that women therefore had for one another's support, and the potential that lay in giving it. They do not always concur with their protégées, but these mentors, like Hekate, steadfastly usher them across the threshold and onto the next steps.

## Chapter 7

### Conclusions

The period from mid-seventeenth century to mid-eighteenth century in France was marked by centralization of power followed by great social change. The Fronde (1648-1651) marked the last significant challenge to the monarchy prior to the revolution, ending the dominance of networks of dispersed power that had persisted from the Middle Ages through the first half of the seventeenth century. Louis XIV's control over the country not only concentrated governmental power but also affected family life as well as the acceptable esthetics of art and literature. Finally able to perform the functions that it had claimed for many decades, the crown asserted authority over the lives of its citizens more intrusively than had previously been the case. As power was centralized in the state, that process is mirrored in the family, in which wives, sons, and daughters were increasingly subject to the patriarch.

Louis XIV's death in 1715 marked the end of this time of intensely concentrated power as well as many of its cultural and social repercussions. For example, regent Phillippe d'Orleans called back into the country the troupe of actors associated with the Théâtre Italien, who had been banished by the defunct king (Rubellin 10). Though of course two more monarchs would assume the throne before the revolution, the tides of thought were beginning to shift in France in the early eighteenth century. Movement up or down the social ladder emerged as a possibility. The theme of social mobility and the implicit questioning of the hierarchy of classes appeared in literature of the period. At the same time that divisions

among people became less defined, literary genres also changed. From the strict dichotomy between tragedy and comedy emerged plays with happy endings but with serious tones in the midst of crisis. In addition to a certain hybridism of tone, this new genre, the *drame bourgeois*, treated topics that had previously been deemed inappropriate for the stage, including questions of money.

The works considered here reflect circumstances that were constants for women's lives in France throughout the period as well as some of the differences in realities from the 1660s to 1750. The central constant was that inequality between men and women "[allait] de soi" (Haase-Dubosc *Ravie* 16). This study has focused on the strategies that female characters in literature of the period employ to cope with the challenges of that unequal status. The tone of these texts shows an increasing realism that reflects the changing requirements of literature. Scudéry's characters face physical dangers and psychological dilemmas, but the question of financial support does not arise. In 1735, the frank discussion of Dorante's *légitime* and of the consequences of an *enlèvement* (Marivaux's *La mère confidente*) is bold yet demonstrates that such topics could be addressed in literature by aristocratic characters. Graffigny's works written mid-century reflect both the candor of the times and her specific experience as a woman without a reliable means of support. Women's vulnerability and dependence in society are very clearly articulated in both *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* (1747) and *Cénie* (1750).<sup>102</sup> All six texts nevertheless show cooperation among women as an essential factor in bringing the young women from vulnerability to security.

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<sup>102</sup> We may recall that Graffigny was a long-time correspondent and friend of Voltaire and that *Cénie* premiered in the same year that the *Encyclopédie* was published.



None of the works discussed here features a relationship between women as its central plotline. *Mathilde* is not about a friendship between two young women, nor is *La double inconstance* about women helping each other. While *La mère confidente* and *Cénie* place a significant accent on the role of the mother, each of these plots is driven by *un mariage à faire* (even if, in *Lettres d'une Péruvienne*, there never is a wedding). What we find then is that in prose and theater composed by three different authors over a period of nearly a century, in stories arranged around the classic question of young women's marriages, a successful outcome for the heroine depends upon the guidance and help of a female mentor. This commonality appears despite the authors' different genders and literary styles. Idealistic Scudéry paints her characters and their bonds as images of perfection, while sarcastic Marivaux invites us to laugh at his, and passionate Graffigny gives us complex characters who evoke our sympathy and admiration and make us critique the societal flaws that trouble them. There is great variation in the degree to which we as readers know the characters. The type-characters of *La double inconstance* reveal very few of their thoughts, while Zilia pours out her heart throughout the length of *Lettres d'une Péruvienne*. We find, however, that the happy endings given to each set of characters by the authors *all* depend on female mentors. Without their guides, Célinte and Zilia would be dead, Mathilde would be in an ill-suited marriage, Cénie and Sylvia would likely find themselves isolated and destitute, and Angélique would lose her reputation, her self-respect, and the affection of both mother and husband.

The critical roles played by the mentors in all of these stories suggest that the authors could not conceive of a young woman's successfully conquering the hurdles before her without such help. We may conclude then that they perceived such guidance as an essential

part of a young woman's coming of age in France in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Mentoring has been defined here as a relationship of guidance, in which one person with wisdom or experience that another does not have, helps the less experienced one make a transition (Chap.3, 56). Common features of mentoring link the six narratives. Every relationship features help that moves a young woman across a critical threshold and on to the next step of her life. Other principal themes are hospitality, reciprocity, and surprise. Many mentors offer their charges shelter for a long or short time. In several stories, the guide contributes to her protégée's development by asking her to do something in return, much as Athena asks Telemachus to be her host. Finally, a common thread is that those who mentor may be unexpected people.

Hospitality, such as that offered by Metaneira to Demeter or by Nausicaa and her parents to Odysseus, occupies a privileged position in the ancient Greek tales of journey-taking. Those who provide food, shelter, supplies, and directions permit the traveler to continue. All three of Célinte's mentors in Scudéry's first novella--Lysiane, Mélise, and the abbess Clarinte--provide that gift. Mathilde also receives it from Théodore, as does Zilia from Céline. Because she is a servant, Orphise does not have a home to open to Cénie, but she offers to accompany her daughter to a convent, that is, to leave a comfortable home for a common living situation that promises to be far from a life of leisure. In this way, she displays the spirit of hospitality--sharing her lot with another. Nausicaa says to Odysseus when he washes up on shore, "But now you have come here, all that's mine is yours" (218).

In the *Hymn to Demeter*, Metaneira helps restore her guest Demeter to stability through work. The goddess cares for the child Domophoon and performs daily household

tasks. In *Lettres d'une Péruvienne*, Céline also asks things of Zilia and thus builds her confidence and sense of belonging. She entrusts the Peruvian with the secret correspondence with her suitor. Mathilde reciprocates her mother's devotion by agreeing to refuse marriage to the king who had once rejected the older woman, and she responds to Laure's friendship by returning to Avignon. Cénie shows compassion for Orphise's feelings even in the midst of her own crisis, and Angélique is prepared to denounce her love for Dorante rather than betray her mother by eloping.

The many disguises taken by Athena suggest that mentors may appear in unexpected people. Certainly, that is the case in both of Scudéry's novellas. In *Célinte*, the heroine's relative Lysiane provides shelter for her following the death of Célinte's parents. Though the narrator's description of Lysiane's bizarre moods does not dispose the reader to admire her especially, and though she is absent as soon as the story's main adventure of the narrative begins, she provides the heroine with hospitality and a social apprenticeship. In *Mathilde*, Théodore, the heroine's relative whom she does not especially like, gives her shelter that protects her reputation and offers valuable information about the Spanish court. Marivaux's Flaminia in *La double inconstance* may be the least expected mentor of all. A servant in the court of the prince who has abducted the heroine, she has less official power than any main character in the play, and yet she successfully manipulates all, including Silvia, to an end that is beneficial to both women. Graffigny's Céline, Déterville's sister in *Lettres d'une Péruvienne*, is also a surprising mentor. The heroine Zilia is essentially at the mercy of Déterville and his family. Although no one ever harms or threatens her, she is dependent upon the French family for food and shelter. Déterville's attempts to persuade the Peruvian to marry him are therefore not without considerable implicit pressure. His sympathetic sister

Céline is a most unlikely ally to Zilia. It is nevertheless the young French woman who gives her important information about French society, provides her with a place to live that does not require constant contact with Déterville, saves her from her suicidal attempts, and finally helps assure her independence.

While all of the relationships share the feature that the mentors help their charges make transitions, the dynamics take different forms. Those that are more lateral, cooperative, and transparent follow more closely the model of mentoring seen in the *Hymn to Demeter*. Those pairs in which the guide helps the charge without sharing much information resemble Athena's style more closely.

By keeping her identity hidden from him, Athena keeps Telemachus ever in a state of dependence on her. They may be making the journey together, but she is making the decisions about what needs to happen next, and he does not participate in them. Demeter's mentors Hekate and Metaneira are a peer and a subordinate, respectively. Even when Demeter mentors her daughter, her approach is non-authoritative. Persephone ate part of the pomegranate before leaving the Underworld, meaning that she will always have to return there. Once Demeter learns this, she changes the subject and continues rejoicing at her daughter's return, although she knows that she will always have to leave again. In this way, she represents a template for the mentor whose charge makes a choice that differs from what she would have chosen for her. To accept that choice marks the creation of a new relationship, one that resembles friendship more than an authoritative dynamic. Thus we see that a mother-daughter pair is not necessarily hierarchical in nature. When Scudéry's Laure smiles at Mathilde while she presents Alphonse as her new husband, when Madame Argante says to Angélique in *La mère confidente*, "Je vous permets d'aimer Dorante," when Orphise

agrees to help Cénie marry the man she loves, and when Céline helps Zilia buy a house, we see images of Demeter's accepting that the pomegranate has been eaten. While mother-daughter dynamics do not have to follow the top-down model illustrated by Athena and Telemachus, relationships between peers might do so. Flaminia is the example *par excellence* of such a mentor. She is not Silvia's mother and has no official power to determine her future, yet she controls her charge's actions more than do any of the mothers discussed here.

Graffigny and Scudéry both depict interactions reminiscent of Hekate and Demeter, while Marivaux shows mentoring more like that of dominating Athena. Even though Marivaux falls chronologically between the two female authors, the differences seem to reflect distinctions among the authors rather than changing thought in French society at large. There is, however, a clearly discernable pattern of change in the obstacles that the young women face as we move from the 1660s to 1750.

Scudéry's tales differ from the works written in the eighteenth century in that the protection that the heroines need is often from physical danger. The abbess Clarinte defends Célinte from her jilted suitor, leading an army in the environs of the convent, and Mathilde fears the dangerous prince who threatened to kidnap her. This specter of violence reflects the seventeenth century both in terms of the historical reality--France was indeed not far removed from a period of profound instability--as well as literary conventions. Physical danger was a threat becoming to an aristocratic heroine, while financial insecurity was not. The relationships that Scudéry portrays demonstrate the importance that she places on cooperation among women without evoking questions of economic fragility.

Mentoring in the form of advice against the threat of an ill-matched marriage is a theme evoked by both Scudéry and Marivaux, but with different emphases. Mathilde's mentors Laure and Constance advise against marriages that might threaten her happiness or her mother Constance's honor. Marivaux's plays, on the other hand, feature the concern for economic well-being as a primary consideration in marriage. His tone is ironic, and his mentors' actions are pragmatic. The realism with which he evokes women's struggles suggests a reading of his plays as social criticism, but their tone does not permit that as a conclusion. We may say that he presents the problems through satire, but that the objects of his satire are both the women *and* the society in which they function.

Stability, defined broadly as including both finances and a socially acceptable home, is the primary goal sought by mentors in all four works from the eighteenth century. Flaminia (*La double inconstance*), Madame Argante (*La mère confidente*), Céline (*Lettres d'une Péruvienne*), and Orphise (*Cénie*) all work to ensure that their respective heroines will have a decent place to be and a means of support--concerns deemed unsuitable for literature in the previous century. While the two plays by Marivaux considered here portray women's lives with much more realism than do Scudéry's novellas, their light note does not give the impression of a call for change. Graffigny, however, gives very clear images of women's status; *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* and *Cénie* do not soften their subjects by making them amusing. Her tone is neither idealized nor satirical, but compassionate. She portrays relationships among characters in a manner that is admiring but includes imperfections in the individual characters and in their relationships that we do not find in Scudéry's stories. She pleads the case of women's status in no uncertain terms.

Each work is characterized by the fact that it is daring for the time in which it was written in the problems that it revealed, yet the mentor's (usually conservative) response made it acceptable. By writing about the dangerous prince as a threat to a young woman, marriage as a potentially bad idea, financial insecurity, or a husband judging his wife for the behavior he encouraged, these authors exposed problems that had no easy solutions and in so doing took the risky step of exposing societal ills. At least once in each work, however, we hear the voice of a mentor who counsels her charge to accept some element of the norm in order to survive. The message "Do what is expected of you, for your own good" is communicated by Madame de Chartres to her daughter in *La Princesse de Clèves*, and by Madame de Lambert in her letters of advice to a young friend and to her daughter (1724). We see it expressed in some way by every mentor with the exception of Scudéry's Laure. This commonality reinforces the theme of the mentors' powerlessness. They knew the system but could not change it. Therefore, the best way that they can help their charges is to help them avoid trouble.

Through the representations of each of these authors, we see the common theme of women mentoring other women. We also see the differences due to the individuals' respective approaches and to the changing social climate and literary conventions. Throughout this period, women's inequality as "allant de soi" (Haase-Dubosc *Ravie* 16) remained a constant. If women were less threatened by physical violence in the eighteenth century than they were in the seventeenth century, the less stable social fabric made them more vulnerable to poverty and isolation. Both the absolutism of Louis XIV's time and the changes that followed it presented dangers specific to young women. These authors reflect those dangers by including in their stories of arrival to adulthood one or more female mentors

as necessary to assure a secure future. These women advise, protect, shelter, and accompany their young charges through passages that they could not otherwise navigate. Finally, when the threshold has been crossed, they let them go.



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