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BODY, GENDER, SENSES

SUBVERSIVE EXPRESSIONS IN EARLY MODERN ART AND LITERATURE

Edited by Carin Franzén and Johanna Vernqvist

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Contributors

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networks, and she is currently working on two projects: “Subversive Art and Literature: Aesthetic and Rhetorical Strategies for Early Modern Expressions of Gender Diversity and Love” and “Reading Cultures and Politics: The Women and the Library at Löfstad Castle 1750–1850.”

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Carin Franzén and Johanna Vernqvist

Introduction

This volume explores different subjective strategies used by early modern women – poets, philosophers or artists – who subverted conventional expressions of body, gender and senses. If the body and its sensations are most present, and sometimes viewed in contradictory ways – expressed, visualized or rejected – in early modern art and literature, women have most often served as the objects for these representations (O’Rourke Boyle 1998; Hairston and Stephens 2010; Loh 2019). Furthermore, for male artists, philosophers and poets, they have incarnated the highest good as well as the most sinful vices. Certainly, the troubles of being torn between desires of the flesh and the soul have roots in Christianity, Platonism and the aesthetic expressions of, for example, Petrarch and Dante (Falkeid 2015). Neoplatonists eagerly sought to split body and soul and disregarded what they classified as the lower senses (touch, smell, taste) in favour of the intellectual senses (seeing and hearing). Let us take a famous example: while both the art and love poetry of Michelangelo are partly expressed through Neoplatonic ideals (Saslow 1986, 1991; Francese 2002), we find a strong focus on sensibility and a longing to touch or be touched, physically or emotionally, in his expression. The same tension can be found in Sperone Speroni’s philosophical dialogues, and as we will see in this volume, in Gaspara Stampa’s poetry, as well as in the art of Titian, Lavinia Fontana and Artemisia Gentileschi. Similar interest in corporeal experience and the role of the senses can be discerned throughout early modern Europe, as shown recently in works such as *Affective and Emotional Economies in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Marculescu and Morand Métivier 2018) and *Gender and Emotions in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Destroying Order, Structuring Disorder* (Broomhall 2018).

Polyphonic Epicureanism

Another key to this early modern focus on the senses can be found in the rediscovery of Epicureanism in the Renaissance. The legacy of this ancient school has been well explored. It has been argued that one of its main sources, the recovery of Lucretius’ hexameter poem *De rerum natura* by Poggio Bracciolini in 1417, entailed a “swerve” that implied a “cultural shift at the origins of modern life” (Greenblatt 2011, 11). However, if we became modern in this “swerve” in the sense of rational pleasure-seeking and autonomous agents, in other words modern subjects, in our present era this “self-fashioning” seems to be in crisis. Indeed, many

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of Greenblatt's claims have been seriously criticized, not least his idea that classical culture was lost before the Renaissance. In this volume we argue that women writers and artists appropriated the long legacy of Epicureanism not only for their own purposes but in ways that have new resonance in our present era beyond the idea that we have never been modern (Latour 1993).

In other words, with this volume we seek to propose a female Epicureanism that is polyphonic, and we argue that early modern women took part – as agents – in the early modern formation of new ways of conceiving the body and its senses as well as the world and the self, actualizing the significance of Epicureanism as a female philosophy, and at several moments even as a queer philosophy.

In this way the volume also highlights the diversity of early modern subjectivity, giving due attention to European women artists and writers that in unconventional ways responded to the period's two main intellectual and philosophical attitudes – Stoic or rational; and Epicurean or libertine – towards the body, gender and the senses. These attitudes not only intersect in the period's discussions of virtue and other moral phenomena, but are central in many European women's reception of classical culture. Furthermore, by following this legacy in a transnational perspective, from Italy and Spain to France and Sweden, it becomes possible to discern other forms of subjectivity than the early modern period's dominating subjectivation of female bodies, thinking and desires.

In seven chapters moving from the sixteenth to the mid-eighteenth century, the volume traces the development of Epicureanism and makes an attempt at characterizing the differences between Italian, Spanish, French and northern European appropriations of this legacy. As the chapters show, Epicureanism plays different roles in these contexts, beyond the chronological development from a stress on the control of passions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to a more open-minded attitude towards them during the so-called enlightenment. The volume proposes to see this standard narrative in a new light by emphasizing how early modern women use Epicureanism in particular and classical philosophy in general to express their subjectivity. We argue that when they do this, they also in various ways challenge or even undermine the idea (or ideal) that man is a sovereign subject in control of his body and his desire. Or to paraphrase Richard Shusterman, that it perhaps makes more sense to speak about body-mind experience than of experiences through body *and* mind (Shusterman 2006). By the same token, we as modern readers could reconsider Epicureanism as a queer and female philosophy. We could even rethink early modern philosophies in light of how these women use them as a way to queer the canon.

Queer Moments

The seven contributions to this volume all discuss how the body and the soul, the carnal and the divine, the senses and the mind, could be represented as intertwined and dependent on each other. According to Sara Ahmed, expressions of "queer pleasures," forbidden or regulated desires, open up a re-configuration of bodies that might "'impress' differently upon the surfaces of social space, creating the possibility of social forms that are not constrained by the form of the heterosexual couple" (Ahmed 2004, 165). Such representations consequently imply re-configurations of gender and of philosophical ideas on the constitution of humans and their perception of the world around them. We construe "queer" in the broadest sense given it by Ahmed, who explains queer lives as "maintain[ing] a discomfort with the scripts of heteronormative existence" (Ahmed 2004, 151), thus the aesthetic expressions of "queer pleasures" can, for example, be related to the revival of Epicurean ideas within early modern philosophical discussions on gender configuration and on the knowledge of love. Furthermore, bodily senses, which are essential to Epicurean thinking, were in many ways viewed as subversive during the early modern period, due to the dominance of Christian moral and other philosophical schools.

Early modern artists and writers were certainly living and practising within a set of power relations embedded in existing social and cultural discourses, as well as aesthetic rules regarding genres and forms. However, as Judith Butler argues, the possibility to act, speak and create cultural expressions in transgressive ways "emerges precisely as an improvisational possibility within a field of constraints" (Butler 2004a, 15). The centrality of the body, touch and related affects mediated in early modern art and literature underlines critical relations between emotions, perception and reason. Such expressions can, accordingly, be viewed as attempts to negotiate philosophical ideas of the human as an individual, hegemonic ideas striving to separate body and mind, and prevalent boundaries for gender configuration. Hence, this volume presents a variety of early modern cultural expressions in literature and art that embody views on how "knowledge cannot be separated from the bodily world of feeling and sensation," for "knowledge is bound up with what makes us sweat, shudder, tremble, all those feelings that are crucially felt on the bodily surface, the skin surface where we touch and are touched by the world" (Ahmed 2004, 171).

Thus, Epicureanism, Stoicism, Neoplatonism and Christian philosophies of the early modern period offer paths for women to explore desires and bodily experiences usually reserved for men. Early modern women's need to embody their experience in writing, the very embodiment of their text and art works, is of importance for a better understanding of their different appropriations and rewritings of the canon. For instance, the engagement with heroism in early modern literature by

women demonstrates a redefining that transgresses dominant norms of feminine subjectivity. Other examples give sensory experience a poetic or artistic authority that turns woman's conventional weakness into a strength that could be seen as a "practice that seeks to yield artistry from constraint," to quote Butler's comment on Foucault's idea of a possible critical agency counteracting hegemonic control through stylization (Butler 2004b, 321).

Our Volume

In Eleonora Cappuccilli's discussion of the prophetic discipline of the body and soul in Dominican tertiary Domenica da Paradiso (Domenica Narducci, 1473–1553), a reconfiguration of corporeal experience takes place within a Christian discourse. Domenica, who in 1511 founded La Crocetta, a Dominican convent in Florence, was both inspired by and critical of Dominican reformer Girolamo Savonarola (1452–1498), and championed her own reforms for female Dominicans. Behind the condemnation of worldly affections and passions upheld by doctrinal thinking, stands the recognition that the body is the material and impure part of the creature. However, in Domenica's experience the female body is not only the locus of imperfection but also the medium through which the woman prophet can receive God-given visions and convey His message. In order to be able to do so, the woman prophet must be a clean vessel both in the body and the soul. Thus, her five senses should be like "doors" through which one can perform "good works and receive divine treasures." Domenica was devoted to the medieval prophet and canonized saint Birgitta of Sweden (1303–1373), whose *Books of Heavenly Revelations* focus on the interaction between body and spirit, as "the flesh obeys the spirit and the spirit guides the flesh toward every virtue" (*Revelations* I.33.9). Based on the analysis of Domenica's sermons, visions and letters, this chapter explores her ideas on the necessary bodily and spiritual discipline that the woman prophet should adopt and shows the Birgittine influence on such ideas. As a result, it aims to highlight women's prophetic contribution to the shaping of the early modern subject as a troubled and conflicted union of a sexed body and soul.

This conflict can be related to the incorporated dismissal of women in, for instance, Neoplatonic ideas where the (female) body is connected to low and dangerous love in opposition to the ennobling and virtuous love of (male) souls. However, this consequent dismissal in the philosophical discourse is repeatedly questioned by early modern women writers, poets and painters. In her chapter, Johanna Vernqvist explores the influence of Epicureanism, reintroduced mainly through the discovery of Lucretius' *De rerum natura*, in the works of three Italian women

of the sixteenth century: the poet, philosopher and courtesan Tullia d'Aragona (c. 1501–1556), the Petrarchan poet Gaspara Stampa (c. 1523–1554) and the artist Lavinia Fontana (1552–1614).

Vernqvist argues that d'Aragona's *Dialogo della infinitá di amore* (*Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*) (1547), Fontana's *Mars and Venus* (c. 1595) as well as *Nude Minerva* (1613), and Stampa's *Rime* (1554) embody views on the interrelation between bodily sensations and intellectual knowledge and, further, that their subversive representations of the body and the senses show awareness of "bodily habits and feelings that express [. . .] domination, so that they, along with oppressive social conditions that generate them, can be overcome" (Shusterman 2006, 6). Thus, Vernqvist sheds new light on the works of the three women by showing how Epicurean views can indeed be traced in their philosophical discourses, not least as relates to their ideals of love. They all express how the body, and all its senses, play a central role in striving to reach intellectual and philosophical knowledge and, consequently, that both women and men could make sense of the senses.

Epicurean views are also present in writings of intellectual women in Counter-Reformation Spain. In her chapter, Karine Durin explores the influence of Epicureanism and Stoicism in the philosophical project developed by Spanish philosopher Oliva Sabuco de Nantes y Barrera (1562–1622). Through her father, philosopher Don Miguel Sabuco y Alvarez, she became acquainted with classical and contemporary philosophy as well as medicine. With her collection of treatises, *Nueva filosofía de la naturaleza del hombre* (Madrid, 1587), she became a pioneer of psychosomatic medicine. In spite of the conventional humility declared by the author, the five treatises comprised in this fictitious dialogue reveal a deep and complex philosophical erudition. Sabuco proposed a naturalistic approach to morality, and sought to demonstrate the usefulness of natural history for self-knowledge and ethical living. Durin argues that the originality of Sabuco's philosophical reflection comes from the fact that Stoicism remained closely linked to Epicureanism in her work, especially as regards her ideas about human nature. Durin addresses the way in which Sabuco's text deals with the controversial issues of Epicurean doctrine (such as divine providence and immortality of the soul), and the difficulty of separating Stoic and Epicurean doctrines in light of the medical experience presented in the book. Nonetheless, the search for inner harmony led the author to consider ways of improving human existence in the world. Durin analyzes how the experience of nature (natural spaces and animal species) contributes to define a new interpretation of subjectivity. She demonstrates how Epicureanism becomes a key reference for Sabuco's understanding of the world and the self and how it inspired a political reflection that led Sabuco to go beyond the generally accepted doctrines that she had initially integrated, in order to point out their limitations.

In France as well we find women writers who in different ways engaged with Epicureanism. In her chapter, Nan Gerdes traces Gassendi-inspired Epicureanism as a distinctive feature in Antoinette Deshoulières' (1637–1694) literary production. Antoinette du Ligier de la Garde (1638–1694), her name before she married the Seigneur des Houlières at the age of thirteen, belonged to a privileged nobility. She received her education in her home through the libertine Jean Dehénault, who introduced her to Epicureanism as well as to the new philosophy of Descartes.

In her works she became a critic of the Stoicism that had had a considerable impact on Renaissance philosophy in France, and thus, also of a certain understanding of virtue and heroism revered in the Renaissance. Needless to say, Descartes also embraced this heroic attitude in his philosophy. In order to formulate a critique of heroism aimed at her own age, Deshoulières was selective in her choice of ideals from the classical past. After discussing Deshoulières' Epicurean materialism, as signaled in her poem *Imitation de Lucrèce*, Gerdes connects her poetry with her tragedy *Genséric* by bringing her pervasive critique of heroism to the fore. In doing so, she considers Deshoulières' identification with libertine values, freethinking, and religious scepticism before the poet reconciled with the Catholic Church in 1683. Furthermore, Gerdes relates *Genséric* to the environmentalist assault on man's destructive pursuit of heroic ideals that, with inspiration from the Renaissance tradition, emerges in the poems to counteract the idea of human superiority over nature in rationalism and Christianity alike. While a positive ethics seems absent in the tragedy, the chapter demonstrates how Deshoulières in *Genséric* enhances her critique of man's ambition for mastery in a dawning post-heroic age.

Also pursuing this freethinking vein in early modern France, Sofia Warkander examines the subject of physical constraint and emotional transport in Madame de Villedieu's *Mémoires de la vie de Henriette-Sylvie de Molière* (1672). This French writer, born Marie-Catherine Desjardins (1640–1683), took her pen name Madame de Villedieu from her first lover, Antoine Boësset, sieur of Villedieu. Celebrated in her own time, she was marginalized in the works of literary historians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but is enjoying a literary revival in our day.

In the epistolary novel, the eponymous heroine is frequently confined by external powers, who seek to control her liberty of movement and the passion she inspires in others. Henriette-Sylvie uses all her might to reject her confinement as well as other physical limitations. In her chapter, Warkander demonstrates how the heroine – acting on her own body – circumvents the actions of the world on her body. Furthermore, Henriette-Sylvie continually works to destabilize and dismantle a fixed idea of the truth, be it through her bodily disguises, or through her use of an ironic and playful tone in her narration. In other words, she makes use of narrative strategies that transcend her own body while being simultaneously di-

rected by it, as her agency in creating her own unprecedented life is coupled with constant reminders of her subjugation to those with greater material power. The chapter also draws cursorily on other depictions of physical constraint, such as Guilleragues' *Lettres portugaises* (1669) and Madame de Lafayette's novels, where the figure of the convent as a frame or external law for inner unruliness and passions is a recurring theme. Through this comparison, Warkander highlights how physical enclosure serving to exalt emotional transport – making emotional ardour a substitute for physical freedom – functions as a key to the emotional register and attitude to confinement found in Madame de Villedieu's work.

By tracing the reception of this southern European philosophical and literary discourse in the North, and more specifically in the writings of Christina Queen of Sweden (1626–1689), Carin Franzén reassesses her famous deviations from what was expected of a female regent. The Swedish queen has an established place in European cultural history. In most historical biographies, Christina's abdication in 1654 and her conversion to Catholicism are underlined and seem to have left scholars with a need to establish the "true" reasons for her unconventional actions and a corresponding need to determine her undetermined identity. Through a reading of Christina's maxims in *Les Sentiments Héroiques* and *L'Ouvrage de loisir*, Franzén suggests that they can be regarded as a heroic search for an art of existence that articulates itself on the one hand as a Stoic form of self-control and, on the other, as a questioning of a rational self through a more sceptical and Epicurean attitude towards reason. In addition to maxims that can be placed in the wake of humanist analysis, there are also Christian maxims that sometimes accord with but also contradict this mainly Greco-Roman tradition. These three main veins – Christian, Stoic and Epicurean – create a movement of indetermination in her maxims that the chapter highlights as a characteristic trait of Christina's heroism as well as of her freethinking. In addition, the chapter proposes to conceive of her maxims as a discursive space used in a cultural practice that with Foucault (1990, 38) could be seen as "the art of not being so governed." The conclusion is that Christina's heroism derives from a drive to find her own way through the period's dominating forms of subjectivation by an exploration of the short form as a genre that invites an ongoing reading and an unfinished writing.

Moving into the eighteenth century, Matilda Amundsen Bergström reconnects to the conflict between soul and body by discussing the physical experience of grief in Swedish poet Hedvig Charlotta Nordenflycht (1718–1763). This celebrated Swedish poet was engaged to be married to the mechanic Johan Tideman (1710–1737), whose philosophical naturalism made a great impact upon her. The engagement was, however, broken by the early death of Tideman. In 1741 she married the chaplain Jacob Fabricius (1704–1741). This marriage has been described as a happy love match, but was soon followed by his death. Thus, this second bereavement, only a

few months after the wedding, made her retire to a cottage outside Stockholm to mourn, where she wrote the poetry collection *Den Sörgande Turtur-Dufwan* [The grieving turtle dove] (1743). In “Jag strider med mig sjelf” [I struggle with myself], the opening poem of the collection, the female poetic speaker declares herself unable to write poetry. The conventional aesthetic repertoire of eighteenth-century poetry, full of “empty words,” can offer her no tools to articulate the “waves of sorrow” that have flooded her heart and mind after the sudden death of her beloved. In her grief, poetry as conventionally conceived has lost its meaning-making potential. Nonetheless, the poet continues speaking, chronicling in an additional eight poems a grief that it seems possible to describe only at the level of bodily surface, through attention to physical experience – insomnia, trembling, crying, burning. The result: a collection of poems usually considered the first Swedish example of sentimentalism. Amundsen Bergström argues that, significantly, *Den Sörgande Turtur-Dufwan* is also an example of sensationalism, in the philosophical meaning of the term. In her chapter, she explores this sensational aspect of Nordenflycht’s lyrical description of grief, discussing it not as “queer pleasure,” but as a form of “queer sorrow” holding the potential to open up an ethical as well as aesthetic space where the experience and expression of mourning may be re-configured.

Thus, the collection of chapters brings together early modern women who, in a variety of ways, infused traditional spaces with a more polyphonic discourse. Some of these women worked to transform existing spaces, while others destabilized the very structure of the discourse itself. All of these women are both transgressive and innovative in their own right, and reading them together creates a multi-layered network of women writers whose contributions have not yet been adequately appreciated or studied. The volume does not offer a summary of the development of Epicureanism but through these examples from Italian, Spanish, French and Swedish women writers, we can see how Epicureanism in particular and early modern philosophies in general play various roles in these different but also similar contexts (women’s place in a patriarchal order has a strong tendency to repeat itself) between 1500 and 1700. In this way we also make a new contribution to the understanding of body, gender and senses that has been and will always be at the core of the formation of subjectivity in every place and time. By the same token, the volume offers a way to queer the canon.

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Eleonora Cappuccilli

Domenica da Paradiso and the Prophetic Discipline of the Body and Soul

Although some assumptions changed by the end of the Renaissance, women's sexual difference was understood as deeply rooted in their bodies, particularly in their lower body heat, and was usually seen as indicating a natural inferiority (Maclean 1980, 28–46). Judith Butler, in criticizing the idea that the materiality of bodies has no history, identifies the origins of the association of femininity with materiality in classical etymologies that linked matter with *mater* (mother) and *matrix* (womb), hence with reproduction, thus constituting women's anatomy as destiny (Butler 2011, 6–7). Even though Butler is less interested in the sexed body than in its discursive construction, thus setting aside "the concrete, historical and experiencing body" (Moi 1999, 75), the idea that materiality has a history helps to frame the long-standing identification between women and their bodies, which is found as far back as Aristotle and Aquinas. According to the latter, woman "est de intentione naturae ad opus generationis ordinata" (is according to the plan of nature, and is directed to the work of procreation) (Aquinas 1882 I a 92, a1 AD 1). Women's capacity to procreate was interpreted as a sign of weakness, making the body not only "una faccenda anatomica" [an anatomical fact], but also "un costrutto simbolico" [a symbolic construction] (Bock 1988, 13).[1]

The case of the sixteenth-century woman prophet Domenica da Paradiso – the most important female religious leader in Florentine society at the time (Polizzotto 1993, 521) – can shed new light on the subjective movements that made so many women think of their own body, and women's bodies in general, not as a mark of inferiority, but rather as an instrument of spiritual and intellectual advancement. Moreover, her writings allow us to deepen our understanding of Renaissance women's ideas on and practices of the dialectic between body and intellect that continues to be key to reconstructing the experiences of late medieval and early modern women (Leonard and Whitford 2021; Wiesner-Hanks 2019, 61–111; Scott and Barbezat 2019).

1 All translations are mine, unless noted otherwise.

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While the bodily manifestation of her prophetic charisma played a significant role in the legitimation of her sanctity, Domenica placed particular emphasis on reason and the intellect. She contested representations of female spirituality as merely somatic, which would later be used to support the idea that women could not be included in "an allegedly universalist selfhood [that] emerged through the exclusion of materiality, corporeality, and 'nature,' all of which were implicitly feminized" (Scholz 2000, 57). She also questioned emerging conceptions of individuality (Cappuccilli 2022) according to which "the human being about to become a subject was endowed with a virtually incorporeal body, while the non-subject was declared to inhabit a 'corporeal' body that was part of the 'natural' world" (Scholz 2000, 57). In exalting the knowledge created by the senses, she bridged the traditional philosophical separation between thinking and sensing (Butler 2015, 15). Furthermore, she rejected the separation between mind and body, typical of an idealist view that reduced the body to a mere object entirely subordinated to the mind (Moi 1999, 27).

Domenica's prophetic practice and her justification of it evidenced a conception of the body as a "situation," whereby the sexed body "is our grasp on the world" (De Beauvoir 2011, 44) and in turn the world acts upon the subject. While refusing women's association with the body and nature and simultaneously emphasizing the potential of the senses, she defied women's ancestral identification with Eve, who fell prey to the senses and the devil, instead preaching the Christian need to govern the body through reason. As a prophet called to channel the divine will and seeking Christ-like suffering, Domenica did not see herself as a passive vessel, but rather as an active and conscious agent, who turned her supposed weakness into strength.

However, an ambiguous and unresolved relationship with her body emerges from her works. She martyrized and vilified her body: she made it the object of constant mortification because it represented the irreducible and inescapable reminder of human imperfection and proclivity to temptation. Yet, even though the body remained the material and imperfect part of the Christian subject, it could never be eliminated or humiliated, as it belonged to God. God would not allow the complete annihilation of the body, as it was an essential part of his creation. Behind Domenica's condemnation of worldly passions and her recognition that the body was imperfect and consisting of impure matter stood an appreciation of the possibilities offered by the senses. The female body emerges in Domenica's works not merely as the locus of imperfection but as the medium through which it was possible to receive God-given visions. In this way women prophets stood out from other women, to whom this possibility was barred and whose bodies were considered to be a mark of weakness.

But Domenica argued that in order for a prophet to convey the divine message, their body and soul had to be purified and governed through reason. That is why it was necessary to adopt a strict bodily as well as spiritual discipline, in a continuum between inside and outside, as was common in all early modern thinking (Von Tippelskirch 2021, 11).

Rather than being understood as a top-down, externally imposed posture (Reinhard 1982), discipline emerges in Domenica's works as an individual effort to pursue a Christian model of virtue and perfection. As a result, she contributed to the phenomenon of social disciplining in sixteenth-century Italy. This category, later theorized in Weber's sociology of power (Weber 1978, 1148–1157), and largely adopted, albeit controversially, by German historiography in the twentieth century, was applied to the early modern Italian context by Gerrard Oestreich, Paolo Prodi and others (see Oestreich 2008; Prodi 1982 and 1994; De Boer 2003; Schiera 1999 and 1994; Cappuccilli 2021b), to indicate

> l'insieme dei complessi processi di interazione tra istituzioni e società, [il] tessuto connettivo in cui si formano i modelli di comportamento individuali e collettivi destinati a trasformarsi a loro volta – in un continuo intreccio di elaborazioni e imposizioni, di filtri e controlli – in strutture. (Prodi 1982, 9–10)

> [the sum total of the complex processes of interaction between institutions and society; the connective tissue in which individual and collective models of conduct are formed; models which in turn – through a constant interplay of elaborations, impositions, filters and controls – are destined to be transformed into structures.]

However, it was not only interaction but also conflict that characterized the problem of social discipline in Domenica's case, because discipline was the outcome of a struggle against oneself and against ancient society's imperatives for women. In her experience, discipline was the shaping of the early modern subject as a troubled and conflicted union of a sexed body and a sexed soul.

Based on an analysis of Domenica's life, sermons, visions, hagiography and letters, this chapter discusses her understanding of the role of the body and the senses as gateways to God and transcendence, as well as being objects of discipline. It starts by contextualizing Domenica's life in the Florentine prophetic revival, specifically examining her early attempt to fashion herself on Christ's model of extreme suffering and humility. Thereafter it explores the different influences that shaped her conception of the body, above all that of Birgitta of Sweden (1303–1373). Finally, it draws some conclusions on how Domenica's stratified theorization and experience of the body emerging from her life and works connect with her idea of spirituality and sexed subjectivity and constitute a source of early modern social disciplining.

A Life in Pursuit of Christ's Imitation in Prophetic Florence

A brief account of Domenica's life is necessary to contextualize her prophetic experience within the tumultuous events that threw Florence and Italy into disarray between the end of the fifteenth century and the first decades of the sixteenth century, and within a proliferation of female living saints (*sante vive*), women who were venerated as saints while still alive (Zarri 1996b; Herzig 2008). Domenica Narducci was born in 1473 in Paradiso, a small town near Florence, close to Santa Brigida monastery, to a lower-middle-ranking family of farmers. Her early life was marked by a brief experience within the Birgittine monastery, with Birgitta of Sweden, a canonized visionary who authored eight books of revelations, being a constant presence in her visions and sermons. Domenica had a fairly good knowledge of the life and revelations of the Swedish saint, probably through manuscripts and excerpts copied and circulated by the scribes at Paradiso, in a context in which the Birgittine influence was very widespread across the whole Italian peninsula (Falkeid and Wainwright 2023).

Domenica's first spiritual director, Domenico Benivieni (1460–1507), was a Dominican and a loyal Savonarolan follower. When he died, Francesco da Castiglione took his place. Probably helped by Domenica herself (Gagliardi 2007, 7), Castiglione wrote her hagiography and transcribed her sermons until he died in 1542. Sources on Domenica include her visions, sermons and 117 letters, her hagiography (in Latin and Italian) and the acts of the 1624 canonization process on her life and miracles (Onesti da Castiglione; Riconesi 1637–1640; Narducci 1984, 1985, 1999, 2004; Scattigno 2011; Piro 2014; Leonardi 2011). She carefully revised the texts she dictated even though she claimed to be illiterate, reiterating the *topos* according to which uneducated women were a purer recipient of God's speech: "Io non so ne leggere, ne scrivere, et sono usa amazolare cavolo et cipolle, perche da piccolina fui hortolana [. . .] porgo quello chel Signiore mi mette in bocca" [I cannot read or write, and I am used to picking cabbage and onions because I was a farmer from a young age [. . .] I declaim what the Lord puts in my mouth] (Narducci 1984, 168). She relied on her humble origins and lack of education to prove that she was not reading the Scriptures but was simply divinely inspired, thus defending herself from the accusation of preaching the Gospel, which was banned for women.

Domenica admired Girolamo Savonarola but was not on good terms with his followers from the San Marco convent, who attempted to tame her wayward spirituality. In 1501 she was put on trial, and when asked why she wore the Birgittine habit without being an ordained tertiary, she answered that she did not feel obli-

gated to follow any rule or order, nor did she want to deprive herself of her liberty. In 1509 Tommaso De Vio, master general of the Dominicans, ordered the friars to break off relations with Domenica, to cease to administer the sacraments to her, and to exclude her from all convents in the Tusco-Roman congregation.

In 1511 she founded her own autonomous convent, the convent of the Crocetta in Florence, refused the formal vestition of the Dominicans and became a tertiary. This episode testifies to her search for independence from male authorities, a tendency shared by other female living saints who had, as Rudolph Bell argued, an increasing "hostility to men, a sense of fighting actively against patriarchal structures and the male prelacy" (Bell 1985, 149). But this event also reveals her amicable relationship with the Medici family and the Archbishop of Florence, who approved the birth of the convent after the authorization of Pope Leo X in 1515.

In 1519 Domenica was cited for heresy and accused by Fra Tommaso Caiani, a famous Dominican preacher, of *piagnoneria*, that is, of being a follower of Savonarolan ideas. Caiani was the protector of Dorotea of Lanciuole, whom Domenica denounced for "feigned sanctity" because she pretended for several years that she was surviving on nothing but the Eucharist. Domenica, acquitted of the accusations of heresy, took Dorotea under her wing and received her in her community. Domenica was convinced that Dorotea had been encouraged in her deceit by Fra Tommaso Caiani and other friars of San Marco to promote the construction of a convent in Lanciuole. This episode is significant because, on the one hand, it shows the struggle for power within the Dominican order (Valerio 1992, 30–32), and, on the other, demonstrates Domenica's attempt to sever relations with the Dominican order (Polizzotto 1993, 505). During the 1530s she continued to pursue her pastoral activity and the government of the convent of La Crocetta, as testified in her letters, but in the 1540s, with the death of her confessor, the Counter-Reformation and the authoritarian regime of Cosimo I, her public statements became rare. Domenica died in 1553 in the odour of sanctity. In all her life she followed and innovated models of saintly life that impacted her multi-layered conception of the body and of the different possibilities and states associated with it.

Sanctified and Sublimated Body

Collections of texts on the lives of illustrious women, hagiographies of female saints, and spiritual rules for virgins, widows and wives aimed to transmit certain models of behaviour to early modern women (Zarri 1996a, 7), thus forming a *corpus* for disciplining them. This corpus provided them with "nonliteral mirrors" of

sanctity, giving them information "about certified holy female bodies, those of their predecessors in the enterprise of sanctity" (Jacobson Schutte 1994, 189). The *vita* of Birgitta of Sweden was a fundamental source of saintly discipline for Domenica. The Swedish saint constituted both a prophetic *exemplum* and an embodied "mirror" of sanctity for Domenica, despite the fact that Birgitta's experience was less related to bodily symbols of spirituality than those of contemporary mystics such as Catherine of Siena (Klaniczay 2020, 160). Birgitta focused on the definition and right employment of the intellect and thus contributed to the transformation of female spirituality by distancing it, but not entirely separating it, from its traditionally corporeal identification. Unlike most representations of medieval mystic women, whose religious expressions were depicted as "grounded in physicality," Birgitta's portrayals highlighted the significance of the intellect, which she identified with her uppermost model, the Virgin Mary (Falkeid 2019, 60). Whereas female piety has for a long time been described as primarily somatic, as "the female body [was] a special medium for communication with the incarnate Christ" (Elliott 2010, 21), a growing corpus of research is demonstrating the centrality of mind and reason in the religious experiences of secular and godly women in the Renaissance (Ross 2009).

As a prophetic *exemplum*, Birgitta represented a powerful voice that denounced religious and temporal powers, criticized priestly corruption and their disposition to give in to worldly temptations, stressed the importance of the use of reason, and claimed the authority to interpret the Sacred Scriptures (Cappuccilli 2021a). As an embodied mirror of sanctity and part of what Isabella Gagliardi defined as her "familia celeste" [holy family] (Gagliardi 2007, 171), Birgitta influenced Domenica's ideas on the spiritual need to govern the body and the senses, but not to repress them. This need translated into a specific language, common to many mystic writers, that revolved around the senses. As Piero Camporesi argued, "Un alfabeto sensuale è alle origini del linguaggio mistico che tende per sua intima vocazione a liberarsi dai sensi e dal corpo, non annullandoli, ma sublimandoli, trasferendoli in Dio" [A sensual alphabet is at the origins of the mystic language that tends by its intimate vocation to free itself from the senses and from the body, not obliterating them, but sublimating them, transferring them to God] (Camporesi 1984, 51).

For Domenica, the experiences of Birgitta of Sweden, encapsulated in her *vita*, were testimony to women's capacity to sublimate the body and the senses without effacing them. Birgitta devoted herself to religious life whilst also being married, and, after becoming a widow, did not entirely dismiss her earthly affections. However, she placed her spiritual vocation above attachments to her biological children – which, according to Claire Sahlin, was the meaning of her

mystical pregnancy, when Birgitta felt as if a living child was turning around in her heart (Sahlin 2001, 78–109).

A model of discipline for all women and widows, Birgitta was the central figure of the vision contained in Domenica's consolatory sermon dedicated to Caterina Cibo, Duchess of Camerino, who in 1533 had just lost her husband (Stella 2023). Cibo, who was close to the circle of Spirituali and in particular to the Capuchin reformer Bernardino Ochino (Robin 2007; Valerio 1999; Zarri 2008), was a devotee and protégée of Domenica. The latter wrote several letters to Pope Paul III to convince him to lift the duchess's excommunication, which he had pronounced out of fear of her alliance with the Duke of Urbino. The correspondence between Domenica and the duchess included the transcription of the 1533 sermon, in which we find some of the most important traces of Birgitta's influence on Domenica's conception of the body and the senses, as well as on her idea of the need to discipline them.

In the sermon Domenica exhorts the duchess not to remarry: "Empariamo da questa gloriosa santa Brigida, che haveva tolto lo sposo celeste" [Let's learn from this glorious Saint Birgitta, who married the celestial spouse] (Narducci 1999, 132). Birgitta appears in the vision preceded as in a holy procession by five queens who symbolize the five senses: Queen Light helps Birgitta to see God; Queen Audient enables her to listen to him; Queen Odoriferous allows her to smell him; Queen Taster to taste him; and finally Queen Exclamatory and Governess – who is the most important – serves to praise God, read his words, convey his messages to temporal and spiritual authorities, and govern the necessities of the body. There is no queen of touch, perhaps because the sense of touch was classified as lower, and often associated with the sin of sensuality (Carrillo-Rangel et al. 2019), or because it did not allow one to enjoy the grace of God, who cannot be touched. These queens/senses allow Birgitta to enjoy Christ's grace in a controlled manner:

> La regina Luce si svegghia e la regina Audiente ode e la regina Odorifera sente l'odore e dilettasi in quell'odorare Dio, come fece santa Brigida: non stimava, non odorava se non per necessità de le cose di questo mondo, et a questo modo sentiva odore e conforto di Dio, et era sempre con Dio. (Narducci 1999, 135)
>
> [Queen Light wakes up and Queen Audient hears and Queen Odoriferous smells the scent and delights in smelling God, as Saint Birgitta did: she did not appreciate nor smell the things of this world but for necessity, and in this way she smelled God and felt his comfort, and she was always with God.]

In comparing Saint Birgitta with the queen of smell, Domenica began her discussion of the relationship between spirit and body from one of the lowest senses, thus allowing for a reconsideration of it against the traditionally repressive atti-

tude of the Church. She continued the description of Birgitta by explaining that her choice of becoming God's bride when her husband was still alive refined her senses:

> Ella [. . .] haveva tolto lo sposo innanzi che quel [terreno] morissi, et aveva adornato queste cinque regine in lei. Ella lo risguardava con regina Luce, e con regina Audiente udiva l'ambasciate sua, e con regina Odorifera l'odorava, e con regina Gustatrice lo gustava, e con regina Exclamatrice exclamava, apriva e libri, leggeva le sacre Scritture e scriveva a' prelati et a molta gente che ammassino Dio. (Narducci 1999, 137–138)
>
> [She [. . .] married the [celestial] spouse before the [earthly] one died and she adorned these five queens inside her. She watched him with Queen Light, and with Queen Audient she heard his messages, and with Queen Odoriferous she smelled him, and with Queen Taster she tasted him, and with Queen Exclamatory she exclaimed, opened the books, read the Sacred Scriptures and wrote to the prelates and to many people that they should love God.]

Domenica described Birgitta as immune from the calling of sensuality because of her choice of chastity within marriage, but also emphasized the fact that she employed all her senses to love God. Queen Exclamatory stood for a further faculty, the faculty of praising God, reading his word and conveying his messages to temporal and spiritual authorities.

In eulogizing the senses and underlining their spiritual value Domenica expressed one central topic of her prophetic discourse: the relevance of self-discipline *versus* the annihilation of the body that many theologians believed was the true fulfilment of *imitatio Christi*. Although for her the body was "a prison," it carried within it some inestimable "treasures," i.e., "our souls" (Narducci 1984, 156). Among Domenica's contemporaries, many preached a radical mortification of the body and the perfect hatred of the self, such as the famous Dominican Battista of Crema, who wrote in *De la cognitione et vittoria di se stesso* that "fare qualche violentia al corpo" [to use some violence on the body] was often necessary (Battista da Crema 1531). Unlike them, Domenica reflected on the role of the body/senses in embracing Christ, an idea that was common among late medieval female mystics (Sancho Fibla 2017). In *Epistola della Croce* (1509) she wrote to her spiritual father and disciples:

> il Signore ti ha dato queste cinque porte per le quali hai a operare e ricevere i tesori di Dio, i quali sono mirabili e grandi e pero tieni aperte queste porte [. . .] il Signore ti ha dato le mani, perche governi il corpo per le sue necessita e dipoi abbracci la croce. (Narducci 1984, 158)
>
> [the Lord gave you these five doors through which you must operate and receive God's treasures, which are wondrous and great, therefore keep these doors open [. . .] the Lord gave you hands to govern the body for its needs and thereafter embrace the cross.]

The senses had to be kept "open." But what did they open onto? To unexpected and unacceptable truths, i.e., to God's miracles, that, like the Eucharist, were able to defy those certainties rooted in the human and bodily experience of reality achieved through the senses. For Domenica "la verità di Dio [. . .] trova il suo referente nell'esperienza" [God's truth [. . .] finds its reference in experience] (Valerio 1992, 17).

However, although fundamental, the senses are deceptive and should only be used to perform God's will, and not to try to understand divine truths. A contradictory approach to the potential of the senses lay at the heart of Domenica's theological thinking. While she recognized the senses' limits, she subtly asserted the capacity of all people, including women such as herself, to utilize the senses to become God's instruments.

In her imaginary *Dialogo* with God, she reiterated the *topos* of women's intellectual weakness, but did so in order to upend it into a mark of divine election. Rephrasing Paul (1 Cor 1:27), Domenica stated: "el mio dolce figliolo molte gran cose ha dimostrato verso le donne bench'elle siano stimate debili d'intellecto, ma colui che è più debile è più victorioso e più felice vincendo" [my sweet son showed many great things to women, although they are considered of weak intellect; but those who are the weakest are the most victorious and, in winning, the happiest] (Narducci 2004, 87). Domenica asserted herself as a prophetic subject and reversed the traditional understanding of women's inferiority, but she did not ignore the meaning assigned to women's bodies.

The metaphor of the senses as doors recalls Birgitta's vision received after Lord Elziarius, son of the Countess of Ariano, asked her to pray for him. In this vision the doors symbolize the needs of the body, instead of the senses, but still relate to the corporeal field. The vision concerns a king, representing every Christian, who entrusts his daughter, symbolizing the soul, to a guardian (reason) and tells him to defend his house (the body). Among the rules given to the guardian, one is: "[Do] not [. . .] let any enemy get in through the doors." Then the Virgin Mary explains the symbology of the vision:

> Per portas vero dicte domus intelligo omnia corporis necessaria, que quidem corpus non potest excusare, scilicet comedere, bibere, dormire et vigilare, quando que eciam turbari et letari. Oportet igitur custodem, idest racionem, cum sollicitudine hiis portis, idest corporis necessariis, assistere et cum diuino timore inimicis, ne ad animam introeant, sapienter et assidue resistere. Igitur sicut insumpcione cibi et potus cauendum est, ne inimicus per superfluitatem introeat, que corpus ad seruiendum Deo accidio sum reddit, ita eciam cauendum est, ne per abstinencie nimietatem, que corpus ad omnia facienda defectuosum reddit, hostis ingressum habeat.

> By the doors of the house I mean all the needs of the body, all that a body cannot do without, such as eating, drinking, sleeping and waking, as well as occasionally feeling upset or

> cheerful. Your guardian reason must attend to these doors, that is, to the needs of the body, with care, and with godly fear wisely and steadfastly defend them so that enemies do not get into the soul. Just as when taking food and drink one must make sure not to let the enemy in through excesses that render the body sluggish for the service of God, so too one must make sure so that no enemy gains entry through excessive abstinence, which renders the body feeble for any kind of activity. (Birgitta of Sweden, Rev 7.5.36, 37)

Reason – who attends to the doors, i.e., to the needs of the body, making the latter fit for service to God – is then what puts the body and its needs fully at the disposal of God and impedes its degradation either through excessive consumption or excessive abstinence. Reason constitutes the link between the corporeal and the spiritual. A striking resonance with this passage emerges in Domenica's sermon from 1526 where she states that "la ragione, quando conculca el senso, ha occhi per tutto. Significa ch'ella è illuminata dal capo infin a' piedi e che co' piedi e con tutto 'l corpo vede el suo Dio" [reason, when she subjugates the senses, has eyes for all. It means that she is illuminated from head to toe and that with her toes and her whole body sees her God] (Narducci 1999, 111).

Birgitta's vision is also echoed in the 1533 sermon dedicated to Caterina Cibo to which I referred previously. In that sermon the metaphor of the queens/senses reiterates the question of the discipline of the body, but the role of reason is performed by Queen Exclamatory and Governess, who manages the government of the body: "[Come potrebbe] El corpo cibarsi, lavarsi, raconciarsi, vestirsi, se non fusse questa regina?" [How could the body feed itself, wash itself, tidy itself and dress itself if it were not for this queen?] (Narducci 1999, 136). At the end of this sermon Birgitta returns as a lofty model to imitate: like Birgitta, "non [bisogna] si lasciare stripicciare adosso né lasciarsi corrompere da le damigelle de la sensualità" [You should not let the damsels of sensuality rub off on you or corrupt you] (Narducci 1999, 141). Birgitta, the powerful widow who chose chastity before carnal and earthly love, was the highest example of discipline, knowing how to master her passions, senses and body. Domenica contrasted her with Eve, who should have kept the doors of the senses closed, instead of which the devil "trovò le damigelle della sensualità" [found the damsels of sensuality] (Narducci 1999, 137). Unlike the Virgin Mary, whose body was endowed with divine qualities (divine motherhood, virginity, immaculate conception and holy assumption) that could be venerated but not fully imitated by women (Frugoni 2021, 90), Birgitta was an incarnate subject, an embodied model, who exploited the full potentialities of a woman's body. However, a more complex picture of Domenica's experience and understanding of the body takes shape if one looks at her hagiography, from which emerges her conflictual and deeply unresolved relationship with the body.

Immaterial, Angelified and Martyrized Body

The reference to the Birgittine model demonstrates that Domenica conceived of the body as a means through which God communicated an urgent message, and the door through which she could access an ulterior reality. The body had divine attributes, which made it a sanctified object. In other words, the body could be an active instrument of God through the senses, paving the way for an idea of the subject as someone who is simultaneously acting and acted upon, active and passive (Butler 2015, 15–16). The body is not only a symbolic channel, but also a very material one, with material needs that have to be governed. Yet, while the material nature of the body clearly emerges from Domenica's sermons, in the hagiographic narrative the body acquires different traits. Her *vita*, written in Latin by Francesco da Castiglione and personally revised by Domenica, with a fairly faithful translation into Italian by the Dominican friar Anton Maria Riconesi between 1637 and 1640, describes her body as angelic, that is, incorporeal and spiritual. An original drawing by Francesco da Castiglione even depicts her on the cross, identifying her as "alter Christus" (Callahan 2012), deprived of all her personal traits and elevated to a pure symbol of passion. The recurring description of Domenica's spiritual travels, a hagiographic *topos* related to sixteenth-century living saints, hints at the hagiographer's attempt to convey a dematerialized portrait of Domenica.

Indeed, this dematerialization repeatedly emerges in the tale of her mystic flights, as when she was conducted to the symbolic city of Rome to receive revelations on the future: "in spirito fu condotta a Roma e le vengono rivelate molte cose future" [She was conducted to Rome in spirit and many future things were revealed to her] (Riconesi 1637–1640, I 176r). Her ecstasies are often accompanied by miraculous movements in the air, as many examples show. For instance, "Un ratto mirabile nel quale fu veduta da più persone volare in aria" [She was seen by many people while flying in the air during a wondrous rapture] (Riconesi 1637–1640, I 176r), and "Sente angelici canti, viene rapita in estasi e alzata da terra e riportata nella sua cella dal suo angelo custode" [She hears angelic chants, is rapt in ecstasy and lifted from the ground and brought back into her cell by her guardian angel] (Riconesi 1637–1640, I 196r).

The exchange of hearts is another frequent image: "Estratto il cuore, sostituito con un cuore nuovo e Maggiore" [Her heart was extracted and substituted with a new and bigger one] (Riconesi 1637–1640, I 180r). After this substitution, "[i suoi] sentimenti [erano] più acuti e puri, corpo più debole, la sua mente più elevata" [[Her] sensations were more acute and pure, her body weaker, her mind more elevated] and she was gifted with the "dono della sapienza mediante il quale intendeva le sacre scritture e dettava lettere e libri spirituali" [gift of wis-

dom, through which she understood the Sacred Scriptures and dictated letters and spiritual books] (Riconesi 1637–1640, I 188r). Not only did her heart substitution symbolize the purely immaterial nature of this bodily organ, but the heart itself was also a metaphor for the spiritual and intellectual gifts given to Domenica in view of her future sanctification. However, while picturing the saintly body as evanescent and immaterial, as happened in many contemporary hagiographies modelled on the *Legenda Maior* of Catherine of Siena, the hagiographic tale reveals a conflicted conception of the body. In reporting Domenica's deeds, the hagiographer uncovered the uncanny truth of her body: despite the fact that it could fly through the air, fall in ecstasy and be spiritually elevated, Domenica's body was the earthly remains obstructing her complete sanctification.

This contradiction compelled Domenica to strive for bodily suffering and self-torture whilst simultaneously recognizing the untouchable character of the body as a divine creation. Suffering bodies are at the centre of the religious writings of many prophetic and mystic authors, who belonged to a tradition of imitating the tortured body of Christ. Women often performed bodily religious practices centring on violent expressions of divine possession, illness and weakness, especially during the upsurge of religious unrest on the eve of the Reformation, although similar phenomena were also common in later periods, such as the 1640s English Revolution (Purkiss 1992, 144; Thorne 2013, 134).

For Domenica, self-inflicted pain was a reaction to the perceived limits and flaws of the flesh, but also a strategy to validate her own prophetic charisma in the eyes of her supporters and opponents, since her attempts to hurt herself were usually halted by a supernatural intervention. When reason was not capable of governing the body, the latter became an unbearable burden that she unsuccessfully tried to annihilate. A description is given of Domenica praying and reflecting on her weakness, sensuality and self-hatred:

> Debilitata la sposa di Cristo e la lunghezza dell'orazione stimando la debolezza, sensualità e odio di se stessa cominciò a scorticarsi la mano sinistra ma impedita da Santa Caterina che li ricuci la ferita, essa la sdruciva, considerando in questo cucito l'opere inutili di coloro che operano senza il nodo della fede. (Riconesi 1637–1640, III 511r)
>
> [During a lengthy prayer, Christ's bride was debilitated and meditated on her weakness, sensuality and self-hatred; so she started to skin her left hand, but, blocked by Saint Catherine of Siena who stitched her wound, she would unstitch it, as she considered this stitching to be the worthless work of those who act without the knot of faith.]

Domenica thus performed an exemplary punishment on herself for those who only superficially acted in the name of God. Then she spoke to her "senses," blaming them for becoming too bold, and soon after she turned against her body:

> "veggo ben io che tu hai preso troppo animo, e che sei diventato troppo audace, e che tu vuoi imitare le ranocchie le quali nuotano leggermente nell'acqua e querule garriscono e bevono; queste sono le loro opere che desideri di fare il medesimo [. . .]." Detto questo, infiammata di vendetta contro al proprio corpo, prese il coltello, cominciò a tagliarsi la pelle. (Riconesi 1637–1640, III 511v)
>
> ["I see that you have taken too much courage, you have become too audacious, and you want to imitate the frogs who lightly swim in the sea, and querulously chirp and drink; these are the same works that you desire to do [. . .]." This said, inflamed with revenge against her own body, she took the knife and started to cut her skin.]

She justified her brute actions against herself by saying: "molto più atroci furono le piaghe che sostenne il mio redentore" [The sores that my redeemer bore were much more atrocious] (Riconesi 1637–1640, III 511v). Saint Catherine of Siena, the patroness of the Dominicans, appeared again and scolded her: "Non hai alcuno ius contro questo corpo; egli non è tuo, forse ti sei scordata che hai rinunziato il tuo libero arbitrio?" [You do not have any right against this body. It is not yours: have you perhaps forgotten that you renounced your free will?] (Riconesi 1637–1640, III 511r). Domenica insisted and implored Catherine to help her "scortic[are] questo porco" [skin this swine] (*porco*, i.e., "swine" is an anagram of *corpo*, i.e., "body"). Catherine answered: "offenderesti il signore" [you would offend the Lord], she therefore wanted instead to "ricucire questa ferita" [stitch this wound again] (Riconesi 1637–1640, III 511v). Catherine thus stopped Domenica's self-torture with a supernatural intervention.

A deep hatred of the body reemerges in a conversation between Domenica and her spiritual father, who told her he could not find any mortal sin in her. The hagiography reports that she blamed her tongue for being incapable of sincere confession and tried to cut it off, but she was stopped. Domenica then bit her tongue until it tore, but the Lord healed it and exhorted her to pray for the people before his plague arrived (Riconesi 1637–1640, III 512v). Domenica's self-harm was constantly blocked by God or the saints with the double aim of proving her sanctity and testifying that only God could dispose of the saint's body. Yet, despite these miraculous interventions, Domenica was not completely discouraged from persecuting her body and manifesting a holy self-contempt. The sex-based connotations of Domenica's self-hatred, i.e., its being directed against her female body as the locus of intolerable sexual impulses, permeated multiple episodes of her life but were particularly evident in the "tale of the eel." In one instance Domenica wanted to annihilate her inordinate desire for food:

> avendo la sposa di Cristo avuto voglia d'una anguilla salata per mortificare la sua gola prese la bambagia del calamaio e assottigliatala in forma d'anguilla, la voleva mangiare, ma proibita dall'Angiolo, mangiò il capo di una anguilla crudo, in terra, come le gatte, per disprezzo di se stessa. (Riconesi 1637–1640, III 529r)
>
> [As Christ's bride wanted a salty eel, to mortify her throat, after taking cottonwool from the inkpot and flattening it into the form of an eel, she was going to eat it. Halted by the Angel, she ate the head of a raw eel while lying on the ground like a female cat, in contempt of herself.]

Here unspoken sexual temptations – implicitly and symbolically recalled by the condemnation of gluttony – torment Domenica, whose female body is not only the locus of a specifically sex-based desire to suffer but also the locus of sex-based self-punishment. However, self-harm was not only a way to atone for having a female body, but also a way to shed light on Domenica's innate connection with the destiny of the city of Florence. As the hagiography reports, Domenica,

> Avida di patire da limosina a un'inferma per aver da lei de pidocchi, e proibita di far troppe limosine si trova miracolosamente in tasca alcuni quattrini e li da all'istessa povera e li toglie altri pidocchi quali si pose drento alla camicia per essere da quelli corrosa. (Riconesi 1637–1640, III 523r)
>
> [Eager to suffer, gave alms to a sick woman in order to have her lice. Although she was banned from giving too many alms, she miraculously found some coins in her pocket and gave them to that poor woman. Domenica simultaneously grabbed some lice from the woman and put them in her own shirt so as to be bitten by them.]

In torturing herself for the weakness of her flesh, Domenica risked sliding into worse sins. But instead of letting her fall into the devil's arms, another miraculous intervention saved her, confirming her sanctity and dispelling suspicions of diabolical inspiration:

> Come ella fu corrosa da suddetti vermi in modo che versava sangue et apparendoli il demonio in effigie della Gloriosa vergine essa accesa del divino amore lo schernisce e lo forza a pigliar forma orribile li getta della sua carne in faccia e percosso lo scaccia. (Riconesi 1637–1640, III 525r)
>
> [As she was corroded by the above-mentioned vermin so that she was pouring blood, the devil appeared disguised as the glorious Virgin. Enlightened by the divine love, however, [Domenica] ridiculed the devil and forced him to reveal his horrible form, threw the lice from her flesh against his face, and beat him away.]

In the end, Christ appeared to Domenica who prayed to him to save Florence through her sacrifice, just as he suffered to save humanity:

> Nelle morsicature de suddetti vermi considerando la sposa di Cristo la sua passione egli li apparve e li manifesta la causa della suddetta tentazione del demonio e chiedendoli essa di

> patire per la città di Firenze il Signore le dice essere necessario che egli mandi il flagello e in un istante la libera dai vermi e piaghe suddette. (Riconesi 1637–1640, III 527r)
>
> [While Christ's bride was looking at the vermin's bites and considering his passion, he appeared and manifested the cause of the above-mentioned temptation of the devil. As she asked to suffer for the sake of the city of Florence, the Lord told her it was necessary that he send the plague and at once freed her from the above-mentioned worms and wounds.]

The Florentine people had gone too far: "essi mi voltano le spalle, ricalcitrano, e non vogliono venire a me [. . .] disprezzano me e quelli che li chiamano: né vogliono udire più la verità" [They turn their backs on me, are recalcitrant and do not want to come to me [. . .] they despise me and those who call them; they do not want to listen to the truth anymore] (Riconesi 1637–1640, III 527v).

Unlike Domenica, whose mortal body was saved, the body politic of Florence could not be spared by God's punishment as a result of the corruption and lack of faith of its inhabitants. As a prophet, Domenica could not prevent the ruin of Florence but, by exposing its causes, she made God's will and justice manifest.

Conclusion

Angelified, sanctified and martyred: these bodily states are always intertwined in Domenica's life and works, confirming the idea that the body is always a *symbolic construction*, and not just an anatomical fact. Domenica did not merely despise the body as the locus of imperfection and impurity: her scorn of bodily and sensual temptations went hand in hand with the recognition of the relevance of the body in facilitating communion with God. Like previous mystic women such as Catherine of Siena, who appropriated a corporeal language of rapture, Domenica extolled bodily powers while arguing for the need to govern them through discipline and the use of reason. Her spiritual raptures, visions and mystic flights angelified and sanctified her body and its faculties.

Domenica's definition of the senses as doors to transcendence – therefore as related not only to the material but also to the supernatural realm – delineates a specific understanding of the body and reality. Corporeal faculties do not simply mediate one's access to reality but can also show what transcends and determines reality itself. In this sense, Domenica employed the body as both a passive and active instrument for realizing God's will. In doing so, she asserted the need to pursue the holy union of body and soul through reason and the government of the senses. Discipline thus constituted a crucial element of her prophetic charisma and was incarnated in her work by Birgitta of Sweden who, in contrast with Eve, proved women's capacity to renounce worldly pleasures and wholly dedicate themselves

to God. Despite being the source of Domenica's prophetic authority, discipline was by no means limited to the elected. On the contrary, as Domenica's sermons emphasized, every individual had to continuously and autonomously cultivate it. This ideal of self-discipline contributed to the rising process of social disciplining in Europe.

But although the use of reason and the government of the senses were fundamental in enjoying divine grace, they were not sufficient. They had to be completed by the love of God, the lack of which (or the impression that it was lacking) had to be corrected through self-inflicted bodily punishment.

Self-harm and mortification afflicted Domenica's body, making it comparable to that of the Christian martyrs, thus worthy of veneration as a saintly body. In the hagiographic narrative, the superior reason of God or the saints intervened to stop the self-inflicted martyrdom, suggesting that God did not demand the annihilation of the bodies of his creatures. Domenica actively performed *imitatio Christi* through intense suffering only to be interrupted by God and her protecting saints: since her body was not her own, but God's, Domenica could not dispose of it as she wished. Miraculous interventions served a double purpose: they uncovered the unescapable nature of the body, which could never be utterly transcended, and confirmed her sanctity. The body could be cleansed or harmed, but never erased, and was both a chain that tied her to the world and matter as well as being a door to heaven. While the body, and specifically the female body, constituted an intrinsic limit to elevation, it could also become the link to otherworldly pleasures and truth. Through discipline, reason and the love of God, the body could turn women's weakness into strength.

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Johanna Vernqvist

Subversive Bodies and the Sense of the Senses: Lavinia Fontana, Tullia d'Aragona and Gaspara Stampa

This chapter explores Epicurean traces in the works of early modern artists, writers and poets Tullia d'Aragona (c. 1501–1556), Gaspara Stampa (c. 1523–1554) and Lavinia Fontana (1552–1614). Reintroduced mainly through Poggio Bracciolini's discovery of Lucretius' *De rerum natura* (*On the Nature of Things*), Epicureanism stands in contrast to early modern hegemonic ideas striving to separate body and mind. In this chapter, I argue that the writings and paintings of Fontana, d'Aragona and Stampa embody views on how "knowledge cannot be separated from the bodily world of feeling and sensation" (Ahmed 2004, 171), and that their successful representations of the (female) body and the senses show awareness of the "bodily habits and feelings that express [. . .] domination, so that they, along with oppressive social conditions that generate them, can be overcome" (Shusterman 2006, 6). Thus, in line with Sara Ahmed's assessment of the relation between knowledge and sensations, and Richard Shusterman's theory of the essential union of body-mind summed up as the concept of "somaesthetic," the analysis explores how early modern literary and artistic expressions of philosophical ideas were challenged through subversive expressions in women's art.

Stampa, d'Aragona and Fontana mastered several forms of art, such as painting, music and literature and actively participated in the elite circles of cultural practitioners. Thus, they were performing within social and cultural discourses as well as through aesthetic rules for the genres of art and literature. Their views on the correspondence between intellect, bodily senses and reason, or "thinking through the body" (Shusterman 2006, 17), were made possible through the artists' and writers' performances within specific arenas provided by the philosophical debates and cultural networks they were part of. In these spaces, "women and men could interact in ways circumscribed by cultural manners and mores and influenced by philosophical ideals, yet, at the same time, critique and transgress those very boundaries, thanks to the scope for play inherent in such spaces" (Campbell 2006, 11). Furthermore, Sheila Barker's description of the interrelation between literature and the visual arts in Artemisia Gentileschi's "imaginative and

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poetic vision" (Barker 2021, 14) serves as a backdrop to this chapter, since such a vision extends also to the works by Fontana, d'Aragona and Stampa, in which the body plays a central role and where women are represented – not as objects, but as subjects – in their philosophical understandings of love. In order to demonstrate how corporeality and intellectual ideas are entangled in their works I start with a discussion of two paintings by Lavinia Fontana, the Alba *Mars and Venus* and the Borghese *Nude Minerva*,[1] which in a second step will be connected to the love philosophy of Tullia d'Aragona and the lyrical poetry of Gaspara Stampa.

Lavinia Fontana, Sensing the Body

Lavinia Fontana was born in 1552 in Bologna, where her father Prospero Fontana was a recognized painter. Trained by her father, Fontana would follow the same career and excelled as an artist, with a total of 135 works created during her lifetime. Her marriage to Giovan Paolo Zappi, Count of Imola, in 1577 raised Fontana's social status, and due to her fame as a highly skilled painter she gained a vast network of intellectuals through her patronage in Bologna and Rome. Thus, "Fontana's social status changed from being a mere daughter of a painter to a *docta* and *donna nobile*: cultivated, an exemplar in the art of drawing and painting, and playing a musical instrument as well as teaching" (De Girolami Cheney 2020, 18). Gregory XIII, Clement VII and Paul V all commissioned work from her.

Lavinia Fontana was the first female painter to depict women nude, including herself as pregnant. She often portrayed mythological motifs, manifesting "metaphorically the meaning of knowledge – as in her depictions of Minerva and Prudence" (De Girolami Cheney 2020). Fundamentally subversive in her art, she challenged the discourse from within, strategically creating her self-portraits to display her intellectual and artistic skills, while the more erotic themes were made on commission with the purpose of being admired in private.

In 1595, Lavinia Fontana finished her *Mars and Venus*, (see Fig. 1) a private commission, perhaps by Jacopo Boncompagni, son of Pope Gregory XIII (Dal Pozzolo 2019a and b). The painting shows Mars and Venus in a bedroom, Mars sitting to the left of Venus, who is also seated but on a separate stool. In the backdrop there is a bed on which Cupid is sleeping. Mars wears only his helmet and silk garments covering his lower body. He is looking at Venus as he touches her left buttock. Venus is

1 The *Nude Minerva* is the title used in the Ruiz Gómez (ed.) anthology of 2019. In the collection of the Galleria Borghese and in other sources it is also known as *Minerva in atto di abbigliarsi* [*Minerva Dressing*].

naked, seated on a garment that has been taken off, her back facing the viewer; she wears a pearl necklace and earrings, and holds a flower in her right hand. She is looking over her shoulder, directly at the viewer of the painting. De Girolami Cheney (2020, 74) interprets Fontana's *Mars and Venus* as a vision where ancient ideals of physical beauty merge together with the Neoplatonic view of the soul's comprehension of beauty. However, while referring to Benedetto Varchi, Leone Ebreo and Mario Equicola – all writers on ideas about the body and the senses in slightly different ways – she does not consider the growing interest in Epicureanism, focused on the importance of experience through the senses, that had become established in the philosophical discourse of the early modern period (Maurette 2014; Palmer 2014). Instead, De Girolami Cheney claims that Fontana, despite her daring motifs, always worked "within the boundaries of her culture and its moral, religious, and gender codes" (2020, 76). While this argument is convincing as regards many of Fontana's works, I am more inclined to agree with Sheila Barker who notes that Fontana

> became the first female European artist to take up the risqué genre of erotic nudes. This fact has been understood only recently, in large part because art historians previously sought to reconcile Fontana's carnal subjects with her religious imagery by interpreting her paintings of unclothed Minervas as non-sexual, chaste allegories of peace and Platonic love. However, it is no longer possible to deny that Fontana's female nudes are deliberately sensual with the emergence in recent years of several patently saucy works, including the *Mars and Venus* of c. 1595. (Barker 2021, 17)

Mars and Venus

The inferiority of the body was well established in Fontana's time, viewed as an "instrumental servant to the soul" often "coupled with 'gendering' the body in a way that underscores its inferior, serving status while also reinforcing and naturalizing the second-class status of the gender with which it is associated – woman" (Shusterman 2006, 9). I argue that Fontana's portrayal of Venus should be viewed as an attempt to challenge this conception. Notably, in relation to Fontana's *Self-portrait by the Spinet* (1577) De Girolami Cheney highlights the significance of the senses in Fontana's vision and artistic theory "where the senses arouse the spirit, e.g., the senses of touch (playing), hearing (viewer listening to the song) and seeing (the viewer observing the scene) provide a manifestation of the inner state of the artist and a fictive stage for the interaction of the imagery (herself) with the audience's psyche (the future husband)" (2020, 44). The self-portrait is not an erotic piece, but the ideas of the senses expressed in it are clearly also at work in Fontana's *Mars and Venus*, which does explicitly show an erotic scene, and thus, that the "senses arouse the

Fig. 1: Lavinia Fontana, *Mars and Venus*, c. 1595, Oil on canvas, Madrid, with permission and photo from Fundación Casa de Alba, Palacio de Liria, Madrid.

spirit." It is a painting meant to affect the viewer. Thus, it could be understood through the concept of somaesthetics, as a piece that both "concerns the body as the locus of sensory-aesthetic appreciation (*aesthesis*)" and, as the following discussion will show, also participates in "creative self-fashioning" (Shusterman 2006, 2).

As Mars and Venus are "engaged in a love dialogue" (De Girolami Cheney 2020, 89), so is Fontana. The inspiration for the painting stems from the discovery of a statue in Rome, documented by Ulisse Aldrovandi, a Bolognese scientist and friend of the Fontana family, in Palazzo Farnese in 1556. The statue, famed for its exquisite buttocks, which immediately came to be associated with the literary character Venus Callipyge (Aphrodite Kallipygos) of the ancient Greek writer Athenaeus, had inspired Titian to make Venus's backside the focal point of his

Venus and Adonis (Prado) and of a number of following works by his hand and workshop. As Dal Pozzolo (2019a) notes, the motif was extremely successful, present also in works by Veronese, who was also thought to have created Fontana's *Mars and Venus* up until 2008.[2] Thus, Fontana paints herself into the dialogue on love's sensual aspects, already a controversial subject since the Council of Trent and Cardinal Gabriele Paleotti's *Discorso intorno alle imagini sacre et profane* (1582) – a text that "harshly criticised erotic displays in mythological paintings" (Gozzi 2019, 214).

Doubleness of the Nude Minerva

The *Nude Minerva* of 1613 (see Fig. 2) was probably commissioned by Cardinal Scipione Borghese and is the last completed painting by Fontana before her death in 1614.[3] It is the second version of the theme that she made and is still in the collection at Galleria Borghese.[4] It is a large painting, 258 x 190 cm, where Minerva, very like Venus in *Mars and Venus*, is looking over her shoulder directly at the viewer who has caught her undressed, suggestively changing from her armour into an exquisite garment with goldthread embroidery. She is completely nude except for the pearls decorating her hair and is seen from behind, holding her garment so that the left arm is just concealing her breasts from the viewer. In the background can be seen a church (possibly St. Peter's), an olive tree (or laurel) and Minerva's owl sitting on the fence of the balcony. On the floor are Minerva's armour, her weapons, and Cupid playing harmoniously with her helmet.

The Latin name Minerva originated from a word for *thought* and she was a multifaceted goddess. Her patronage covered, most famously, War, but also Science, Wisdom and Medicine as well as Poetry, Music, Arts and Crafts. In my view, there are Epicurean elements in Fontana's way of connecting Minerva's protection of the intellect to the sensual depiction of the goddess. The sensual pleasures and beauty that she represents with her naked body are orchestrated through reason and intellect, represented in her role as the very goddess of knowledge. As

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2 Dal Pozzolo suggested it was by Lavinia Fontana in 2007, and in 2008 this was accepted also by Fernando Checa (Dal Pozzolo 2019b, 222).

3 The commission has recently been questioned by Kristina Herrman Fiore (2018), who argues that it is more likely that Cardinal Borghese purchased the painting or it was gifted to him by the painter herself (see also Tosini 2019a).

4 The second version of *Nude Minerva*, c. 1604–1605, an oil on canvas, is held by the Collection Pavirani in Bologna.

Fig. 2: Lavinia Fontana, *Nude Minerva*, 1613, Oil on canvas, Rome, with permission from Galleria Borghese. Photo: Mauro Coen.

Tosini points out in the article "*Nude Minerva* c. 1613," all her symbols are "didactically displayed," creating an "allegorical tension" as they are contrasted with her gaze and sensual, naked body (2019a, 228). Or, as it is expressed in Ottaviano Rabasco's poem *La Pallade ignuda della famosa pittrice Lavinia Fontana* (1605), which celebrates the other version of the painting (now in the Pavirani collection,

Bologna): “Ma Venere figuri, / Se Palla fingi, e doppio appar l’inganno” [But you depict Venus, / While feigning Pallas, and the deceit appears twofold].[5] Fontana’s *Nude Minerva* is thus an example of how the body may impress itself differently upon the world (Ahmed 2004), contrasting the traditional view of the body (gendered female) as inferior to the mind. Interestingly, Fontana herself was directly connected to the motif of Pallas/Venus, as is also displayed by Rabasco: “Fingi le tue maniere e vaghe, e sante; / C’havrai Pallade espressa / Se delle tele fai specchio a te stessa” [Imagine your manners, both elusive and holy; / You will have Pallas manifested, / If you mirror yourself on your canvases]. The lines point to Fontana’s subversive performance, on the one hand, as a married and respectable woman in line with gender norms, but on the other as a beautiful, desirable and likewise respected female artist mirrored in Minerva.

To speak with Shusterman, the essential body-mind connection highlights both the painting and the painter. Indeed, the painting is intended to be viewed in a private space, suggestively the commissioner’s bedroom, where the multisensory reception of the naked body could inspire a specific performative act as a “locus of sensory-aesthetic appreciation” (Shusterman 2006, 2) that includes both sensual lust and intellectual insight. Thus, the viewer might let the senses arouse the spirit (and the body). However, as expressed by the figure of Minerva, pleasures should not be enjoyed immoderately but sought within and through reason. This view is also most present in Lucretius’ philosophical poem *De rerum natura* and in Tullia d’Aragona’s *Dialogo della infinità di amore* (1547) and will be discussed in the following section.

“I want you to bow to experience”: Tullia d’Aragona Making Sense of Love

Tullia d’Aragona was born in Rome in the early 1500s. Trained by her mother, she became a famous courtesan, but as she developed her poetic and philosophical talent, she also took on a career as a renowned writer. She was the only woman to write a dialogue specifically on love during the first half of the 1500s and the first one to publish a collection of *rime* that included *proposte-risposte* poems side by side. Both works were printed in Venice in 1547 by the Giolito house. The focus here is the *Dialogo della infinità di amore*; a remarkable text – not only because it is written by a woman, but due to the prominent roles that are given to both

5 Tosini (2019b), noted and discussed these lines and the following (227, 225). The citations of Rabasco’s original are from Tosini, but I have chosen to translate them anew. See also Tosini 2019c.

body and soul and her questioning and erasing of gender differences in relation to love, but also in relation to reason and intellectual capacities.

Set in her villa in the countryside of Florence, the dialogue takes place between the characters Tullia, Benedetto Varchi and, at the end, Lattanzio Benucci. There is also a group of unnamed, silent attenders listening to their conversation, contributing to the written text's performative function. Following the conventions of the dialogue genre, revived by Ficino's translations of Plato in the fifteenth century, d'Aragona mirrors an actual environment as well as real people. There are two main speakers: Tullia, named after herself, and Varchi, after the well-known intellectual and poet with the same name; a third speaker appears at the end: Benucci, who was a poet in d'Aragona's circle. While the dialogue makes reference to many of the famous philosophers like Plato, Ficino, Varchi and Leone Ebreo (Hairston 2014; Giovannozzi 2019; Curtis-Wendlandt 2004), I argue that Epicurean traces may also be found in d'Aragona's discourse on love. Thus, the question of belief in knowledge, and knowledge through experience of the senses, is consistent throughout and a primary focus of d'Aragona's philosophical vision.

Poggio Bracciolini's discovery in 1417 of a manuscript of Lucretius' *De rerum natura* sparked a revival of the ideas of Epicurus. The rediscovery revived many intellectuals' interest in Epicurean ideas, including Machiavelli – who was a close friend of one of d'Aragona's most important patrons, Filippo Strozzi – and the doctor Girolamo Fracastoro (Maurette 2014), also assumed to be one of d'Aragona's acquaintances (Hairston 2014, 168; Celani 1891, XLVIII). One of the most challenging aspects was Lucretius' denial of divine involvement in life on earth. He did not deny the existence of gods but maintained that they were far too occupied with their own lives and issues to bother with humans.

The distinction, and possible clash, between religious and philosophical discourse, faith and knowledge, is discussed early in Lucretius' poem. He draws his argument on behalf of philosophy through the example of Iphigenia, sacrificed by Agamemnon, saying:

> Illud in his rebus vereor, ne forte rearis
> impia te rationis inire elementa viamque
> indugredi sceleris. quod contra saepius illa
> religio peperit scelerosa atque impia facta.
>
> One thing I am concerned about: you might, as you commence
> Philosophy, decide you see impiety therein,
> And that the path you enter is the avenue to sin.

> More often, on the contrary, it is *Religion* breeds
> Wickedness and that has given rise to wrongful deeds.
> (Lucretius 2019, 2015, Book l, lines 80–83)[6]

In d'Aragona's dialogue, this differentiation between the reasoning of philosophy and the faith of theology is introduced via the question of God's infinity. Before diving into this discussion, Tullia asks Varchi: "favellate voi nella vostra domanda come teologo o come filosofo?" (are you talking as a theologian or as a philosopher?). Varchi answers that he speaks "[c]ome filosofo" (as a philosopher), whereupon Tullia says: "Voi mi avete tutta racconsolata. Oh, come dubitava che non rispondeste altramente!" (Now you have really restored my confidence. Oh, I was so worried that you might give me a different answer) (d'Aragona 1912, 210; 1997, 77–78).[7] Thus, having clarified that religious thinking is something other than philosophical thinking, the two characters' discussion twists and turns around the question of infinity, and specifically whether love is infinite in the perception of humans' experience.[8] As Russell states – albeit without reference to Lucretius – this division between religion and philosophy is crucial to d'Aragona:

> The male-female relationships she [d'Aragona] proposes finds in itself the basis of its morality and is therefore independent of marriage and religious discipline. [. . .] The Christian concept of morality, with its rigid dichotomy of the spiritual and the physical realms, stigmatized any concession to the sensual nature of humankind. [. . .] Her [d'Aragona's] defense came in the form of a theory that calls for a radical revision of standard principles, for a morality of love that acknowledges the dichotomous nature of both women and men. (Russell, in d'Aragona 1997, 39, 42)

Early in d'Aragona's dialogue this dichotomous nature of humans is brought to the fore, when the character Tullia asks: "Chi non sa che tutto il composto, cioè l'anima e il corpo insieme, è più nobile e più perfetto che l'anima sola?" (Is anyone ignorant of the fact that the whole, body and soul taken together, is more noble and more perfect than the soul by itself?) (d'Aragona 1912, 197; 1997, 65). I suggest, in line with Russell, that this enhancement of the body is a significant strategy that d'Aragona employs to re-value women as equally capable to practise and understand "honest love." As Shusterman argues, the body is both the ground for and medium through which social norms are "transmitted, inscribed and pre-

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6 All further references to Lucretius are from the bilingual edition by Björkeson (2019) and the English translation by Stallings (2015). The references are given according to Book followed by lines, since Lucretius' poem is presented according to that structure.

7 All further references are to Zonta's Italian edition (1912) and Russell and Merry's English translation (1997) and will be given in parentheses directly after citations.

8 Infinity is also a main question for Lucretius but must be discussed on another occasion.

served in society. Ethical codes are mere abstractions until they are given life through incorporation into bodily dispositions and actions" (Shusterman 2006, 6). On the same note, Ahmed states that "[b]odies take the shape of norms that are repeated over time and with force. The work of repetition involves the concealment of labour under the sign of nature" (Ahmed 2004, 145). In the following, I will show how such repetitions of the body and the senses unfold as subversive in d'Aragona's argumentation.

Old Arguments, New Ideas

Tullia d'Aragona uses the old, and constantly repeated, misogynist argument of women's connection to the body, but turns it around and argues that both men and women are constituted by body and soul, and that both are necessary for a full experience of honest love. Further, underscoring the necessity of *individual experience*, d'Aragona continues in her witty style with an expression of doubt about philosophical authorities:

> Varchi. Dunque volete ch'io creda alla auttorità.
>
> Tullia. Messer no, ma alla sperienza, alla quale sola credo molto più che a tutte le ragioni di tutti i filosofi. (1912, 204)
>
> Varchi. So you want me to bow for authority!
>
> Tullia. No sir. I want you to bow to experience, which I trust by itself far more than all the reasons produced by the whole class of philosophers. (1997, 71)

Varchi has already, a few pages earlier, stated that "Alle ragioni si dee credere, non alla auttorità" (We must trust reason, not authority) (d'Aragona 1912, 195; 1997, 63) and, notably, underlines in a rather long passage that everyone who can, by the use of reason, judge the whole content of a book and not only part of it, has the right to believe and think whatever they want. A bold view, but this sceptical vision can be traced back to several classical thinkers, including Lucretius who consistently defends his own philosophy with logical arguments, while criticizing other, illogical, views.

The Importance of Sensual Experience

In the same vein as Lucretius d'Aragona also highlights the necessity of sensual experience for any higher understanding of the world. In Book 1, Lucretius (2019, 2015) rhetorically asks: "quid nobis certius ipsis / sensibus esse potest, qui vera ac falsa notemus?" (What is more certain than our senses to tell the false from real?) (lines 699–700) and in Book 4, focused specifically on the experience of love, he continues this argument:

> Invenies primis ab sensibus esse creatam
> notitiem veri neque sensus posse refelli.
> nam maiore fide debet reperirier illud,
> sponte sua veris quod possit vincere falsa.
> [. . .]
> ideoque necesse est
> non possint alios alii convincere sensus.
> nec porro poterunt ipsi reprehendere sese,
> aequa fides quoniam debebit semper haberi.
> proinde quod in quoquest his visum tempore, verumst.
>
> You'll find the concept of the true is formed and has its root
> In the senses, their testimony such that no one can refute.
> For there must be a higher court to which you can appeal,
> That on its own can disprove what is false by what is real.
> [. . .]
> So one sense can't disprove that which another sense propounds.
> Nor can these senses testify against themselves; they must
> Be granted at all times an equal measure of our trust.
> Thus what they say is true, at any given time, *is* true.
> (Book 4, lines 478–482, 495–499)

In other words, the world is perceived and understood through all human senses, collaborating and equal in their contribution to intellectual knowledge. They lead humans to higher certainties, and as Lucretius continues:

> non modo enim ratio ruat omnis, vita quoque ipsa
> concidat extemplo, nisi credere sensibus ausis
> [. . .]
> Illa tibi est igitur verborum copia cassa
> Omnis quae contra sensus instructa paratast.
>
> not only would all Reason fall apart and come to grief
> But on an instant, Life itself, unless you hazard belief
> In the senses
> [. . .]

> I tell you, all the ranks of word
> On word mustered and armed against the senses are absurd!
> (Book 4, lines 507–513)

These arguments, which contrast with the Platonic view that beauty and love should be perceived through sight and hearing, are clearly echoed by d'Aragona. For example, Varchi tells Tullia: "Voi dovete sapere primieramente che niuno può intendere o conoscere cosa niuna se non mediante i sensi, e che tra le sentimenta il più nobile e il più perfetto è quello del vedere" (First of all you ought to realize that one may not understand or get to know anything at all except through one's senses, and that, of all the senses, the noblest and most exquisite is sight) (d'Aragona 1912, 230; 1997, 98). Although following the Platonic view that sight triumphs over other senses, d'Aragona stresses the necessity for all the senses to collaborate and considers experience through the senses as the only valid source to "understand or get to know anything at all." Furthermore, Tullia explains her arguments on the importance of both body and soul by alluding to the Neoplatonic idea and myth of the androgyne. Tullia argues that a union through sublimated love is not enough, even if it may occur. Criticizing the neglect of other senses than the spiritual ones, she says:

> Bene è vero che, disiderando lo amante, oltra questa unione spiritale, ancora la union corporale per farsi più che può un medesimo con la cosa amata, e non si potendo questa fare, per lo non esser possibile che i corpi penetrin l'un l'altro, egli non si può mai conseguir questo suo disiderio, e così non arriva mai al suo fine, e perciò non può amar con termine, come io conchiusi di sopra. (d'Aragona 1912, 223)

> But, in truth, as it is the lover's wish to achieve a corporeal union besides the spiritual one, in order to effect a total identification with the beloved, and since this corporeal unity can never be attained, because it is not possible for human bodies to be physically merged into one another, the lover can never achieve this longing of his, and so will never satisfy his desire. Thus, he cannot love with a limit, as I concluded earlier. (d'Aragona 1997, 90–91)

In other words, at this point d'Aragona has reached a conclusion regarding the main topic of the dialogue – love's infinity. Since the physical desire for the experience of love never can be satisfied, it will always return, which is further explained in the following:

> tutti necessariamente, in quello istante che hanno ottenuto il disiderio loro, cessano dal moto, ma non lasciano lo amore, e bene spesso lo accrescono; perché, oltra che mai non si contentano a pieno e rimane loro quel disiderio di godere la cosa amata soli e con unione, [. . .] bene spesso ancora, come intemperanti, disiderano di congiungersi ed avere quella dilettazione un'altra volta, e dopo quella una altra, e cosi di mano in mano. (d'Aragona 1912, 236)

> it is quite obvious that in the very moment when humans attain their desire, they automatically cease from their movement but do not discard their love; in fact, they often cause it to increase, because apart from their never being able to derive complete gratification from it, they retain the desire to enjoy the beloved object on their own, and by [continuing] union. [. . .] What is more, its acolytes become still more intemperate in their longing for carnal intercourse; they want to enjoy the thrill one more time, and still one more time after that, and so on. (d'Aragona 1997, 103)

Thus, trusting the senses and an actual experience of love shows that love's infinity is primarily due to bodily desire which will always return. This desire can only be temporarily satisfied, but never completely. The closeness of this argument to Lucretius (2019, 2015) is evident, as he explains:

> Sed leviter poenas frangit Venus inter amorem
> blandaque refrenat morsus admixta voluptas.
> namque in eo spes est, unde est ardoris origo,
> restingui quoque posse ab eodem corpore flammam.
> quod fieri contra totum natura repugnat;
> unaque res haec est, cuius quam plurima habemus,
> tam magis ardescit dira cuppedine pectus.
> [. . .]
> nec penetrare et abire in corpus corpore toto;
> nam facere interdum velle et certare videntur:
> usque adeo cupide in Veneris compagibus haerent,
> membra voluptatis dum vi labefacta liquescunt.
> tandem ubi se erupit nervis collecta cupdido,
> parva fit ardoris violenti pausa parumper.
> inde redit rabies eadem et furor ille revisit,
> cum sibi quod cupiant ipsi contingere quaerunt
>
> But Venus makes their sufferings light
> In the midst of love, and Pleasure, mingled in, curbs back the bite.
> For herein lies a hope: they think that they can quench the fire
> By means of the same body that ignited their desire,
> Something Nature contradicts with all her might. For love
> Is unique: the more we have of it, the more it's not enough.
> [. . .]
> Nor can one body wholly enter the other and pass away –
> For it seems sometimes that this is what they struggle to essay,
> Such do they clasp in the chains of Venus, greedily and tight,
> While limbs go limp, melted with the heat of their delight.
> At last, when loins erupt forth from the gathering desire,
> They are allowed a brief reprieve from passion's raging fire.
> But then the fever starts again, madness must soon return,
> When yet again they seek the thing for which they yearn.
> (Book 4, lines 1084–1089, 1111–1117)

By alluding to such Epicurean values, d'Aragona creates space for the body to, paraphrasing Ahmed's formulation (2004), impress differently on the world, making it clear that the sensory aspects of love are essential to any human's possibility to live and learn about the world. Hence, a little later, Tullia continues this defence of bodily desire by calling upon its natural cause, which is central to Lucretius too:

> [E] perciò né nelle piante né negli animali non si può biasmar cotale amore, né in loro si chiama lascivo o disonesto, né negli uomini ancora; anzi si può e si dee lodare. E tanto più negli uomini, quanto essi producono cose più perfette e più degne che le piante e gli animali non fanno: purché tale appetito non sia sfrenato e troppo strabocchevole, come si vede accader le più volte negli uomini, i quali hanno libero arbitrio. (d'Aragona 1912, 226)
>
> Hence, the first type of love is not to be blamed, either in the plant or the animal kingdom, and it should not be called lascivious or "dishonest" in them, or indeed in human beings. Rather, it can be and should be lauded to a greater extent in humans because they are capable of generating offspring of a more noble and worthy caliber than plants and animals can. My main proviso is that this appetite should not become unbridled and overpowering, for this often happens with human beings, who are endowed with free will. (d'Aragona 1997, 94)

Tullia concludes: "cosi lode merita e non biasimo uno che generi cosa simigliante a sé e si conserve (poiché non può nello individuo, cioè in se stesso) almeno nella specie sua" (so people should be praised, and no one censured, for generating offspring that are similar to themselves, thus perpetuating themselves in the species, since they cannot reproduce themselves as individuals) (d'Aragona 1912, 227; 1997, 94). Concluding the main dispute of the dialogue, Tullia thus compares sexual desire and pleasure to other pleasures, such as eating and drinking, which should never be censured but "anzi lode, perché mediante questi, ristora il caldo naturale e l'umido radicale, per li quali due si mantiene in vita" (rather should be congratulated, because these processes restore the natural warmth and essential humours which maintain us in life) (d'Aragona 1912, 226–227; 1997, 94). Lucretius (2019, 2015) likewise begins his poem with an invocation to Venus underlining the force of generation:

> Aeneadum genetrix, hominum divumque voluptas,
> alma Venus, caeli subter labentia signa
> quae mare navigerum, quae terras frugiferentis
> concelebras, per te quoniam genus omne animantum
> concipitur visitque exortum lumina solis
> [. . .]
> te sequitur cupide quo quamque inducere pergis.
> denique per maria ac montis fluviosque rapacis
> frondiferasque domos avium camposque virentis
> omnibus incutiens blandum per pectora amorem
> effecis ut cupide generatim saecla propagent.

> (Life-stirring Venus, mother of Aeneas and of Rome,
> Pleasure of men and gods, you make all things beneath the dome
> Of sliding constellations teem, you throng the fruited earth
> And the ship-freighted sea – for every species comes to birth
> Conceived through you, and rises forth and gazes on the light
> [. . .]
> So eagerly does each pant after you, so do they heed,
> Caught in the chains of love, and follow you wherever you lead.
> All through the seas and mountains, torrents, leafy-roofed abodes
> Of birds, and greening meadows, your delicious yearning goads
> The breast of every creature, and you urge all things you find
> Lustily to get new generations of their kind.)
> (Book l, lines 1–5, 15–20)

However, as highlighted in the above quote from d'Aragona's *Dialogo*, with the free will of humans comes a *moral* aspect and a need for *reason*.[9] While viewing sexuality as a natural desire, like hunger for food, Lucretius argued that physical desire should be enjoyed within limits, just as we see d'Aragona do here:

> Ma come uno, il quale mangia e bee o più del dovere o fuor di luogo e di tempo, tanto che quello che gli dovria giovare gli noccia, è degno non solo di riprensione, ma di castigo; cosi, anzi molto più, merita gastigo e riprensione chiunque senza regola o misura alcuna si dá in preda agli appetiti carnali, sottoponendo la ragione, la quale dovrebbe esser la reina, al senso e, brievemente, diventando, di uomo razionale, animal brutto. (d'Aragona 1912, 227)

> However, just as we can blame and also chastise someone who eats or drinks more than is reasonable, or at the wrong place and time, in a way that things that were supposed to benefit him actually harm him, so we ought to chastise and blame far more vigorously those persons who yield to the passions of the flesh without due limit and moderation. For in doing so, they subordinate reason, which ought to be the queen of the body, to the senses, and thus they quickly turn from being rational men into being brute animals. (d'Aragona 1997, 94)

Again, reason is praised and attention drawn to the responsibility not to harm oneself or another person by indulging in too much pleasure of any kind – fully in line with Lucretius' view.

To sum up, d'Aragona places her *Dialogo della infinità di amore* at the centre of the early modern debate on love and on women, by extensively referring to classical and contemporary texts. She skilfully criticizes and transgresses existing

9 Notably, Varchi suggests Reason is female whereupon Tullia answers that she doesn't "know if it's female or male" (d'Aragona 1997, 75), a conclusion I view as a performative speech act as she refuses both to agree or contest Varchi's view. The performative effect is consequently a neutralization between different genders in relation to Reason.

configurations of love and gender, body and soul. Thus, Epicurean ideas should be considered alongside the many sources for her ideal of love, in which the actual experiences of the body and of the soul play an equal role in leading humans to true knowledge of love or knowledge of anything at all. As Ahmed explains, "queer moments happen when this failure to reproduce norms as forms of life is embraced or affirmed as a political and ethical alternative" (2004, 146), and I suggest that the *Dialogo* represents such a moment. Through doubt of philosophical (or any) authority, d'Aragona creates her own morality, with strong similarity to Fontana's double Minerva/Venus, based on individual experience through the senses, with reason as their queen. In other words, one should not place one's trust in authority but "alla sperienza," and the body and mind are essentially united in the search for this experience.

Tullia d'Aragona's *Dialogo* was published in Venice in 1547, around the time that Gaspara Stampa began writing and performing her own lyrical poetry. In the last section of this chapter, I will discuss Stampa's vision of sensual love inspired by Epicurean thought as analogous to d'Aragona's body-mind philosophy and the union of bodily and intellectual experiences that was also present in Fontana's paintings.

"one touch, my wound is healed": Gaspara Stampa's Body and Soul

Gaspara Stampa was born in Padua c. 1523 and moved to Venice as a child after her father's death. With her mother and two siblings, she lived a cultivated life and got a humanistic education including training in music, poetry and Latin. As her *Rime* (1554) reveal, she was a skilled lyricist in the Petrarchan tradition and it is believed that she began composing her own poems in the 1540s. Gaspara Stampa's lyrical representation of love's beauty through both body and soul made her famous and highly appreciated in Venice during her own lifetime. Horatio Brunetto, a Venetian poet who published his *Lettere* in 1548, is one of the sources for how Gaspara Stampa was perceived by her contemporaries. While creating his own little catalogue of famous women, Brunetto presents Stampa as a new and unique *exemplum* – very much in line with Stampa's representation of the narrator in her lyrical poetry who seeks fame and glory for her lyrical talents. In his letter, Brunetto writes:

> Vive Helena per le bellezze del corpo; Vive Lucretia per il dono de la castità; vive Camilla per la fierezza del corpo; Vive la dotta Sappho per le bellezze de l'animo, ornato di molte Scienze: Vivono molte altre Illustri Donne, chi per la forma sola del corpo, & chi per il culto dell'animo solo: Ma voi vivete, & vivrete in eterno per le bellezze d'ambe duo congionte insieme. (1548, 183r)
>
> [Helen lived for the beauty of the body; Lucretia lived dedicated to chastity; Camilla lived for the praise of the body; the learned Sappho lived for the beauty of the soul, crowned by many sciences: Many other Illustrious Women live solely for the form of the body, or solely for the cult of the soul: But You live, and will live forever, for the beauty of the two united.] (My translation)

Brunetto's view of the Venetian lyricist, also famed for her beautiful singing voice which added to the sensory experience of her work in her own time, is the focal point of this analysis. As discussed above, for Lucretius the world is perceived and understood through all the human senses, collaborating and equal in their contribution to any intellectual reception of the world. The senses lead humans to higher certainties, and without the senses both reason and life would collapse. These arguments stand in contrast to the Platonic view, enforced by Christian values, of the separation of body and soul, and the view that sight and hearing are the preeminent, higher senses, through which beauty and love should be perceived. These dominating ideas were represented not only in philosophical treatises such as Ficino's, but also in the Petrarchan lyrical tradition. Gaspara Stampa's *Rime*, published posthumously in 1554, is written and performed within this discourse, but presents a constant negotiation of traditional views when promoting a sensual experience of love (Falkeid and Feng 2015; Tylus 2010; Bassanese 2004; Benfell 2005). Furthermore, I argue that her *Rime* should be seen as a contribution to the philosophical debate on love and that it shares the visions presented by Fontana and Tullia d'Aragona, with similar traces of Epicurean ideas.

Trembling and Blushing: Affects on Display

In a sequence of Gaspara Stampa's poems written upon the return of the lyrical beloved, the importance of physical presence becomes prominent. In *Rime* 101, the beloved is awaited and the lyrical subject imagines how the reunion will turn out along with anticipating a number of affects that the moment will cause.[10]

10 All further references to Stampa's poems are to the Tower and Tylus bilingual edition of 2010. The volume is structured in the order of the 1554 edition and the poems are numbered. Thus, I'll refer to the poems by their numbers.

101
Con quai degne accoglienze, ò quai parole
Raccorrò io il mio gradito Amante,
Che torna à me con tante glorie, e tante,
Quante in un sol non vide forse il Sole?
Qual color hor di rose, hor di viole
Fia 'l mio? Qual cor' hor saldo, & hor tremante
Condotta innanzi à quel divin sembiante,
ch'ardir' e tema insieme dar mi suole?
Osarò io con queste fide braccia
Cingerli il caro collo, & accostare
La mia tremante à la sua viva faccia?
Lassa, che pur' à tanto ben penare,
Temo, che 'l cor di gioia non si sfaccia,
chi l'ha provato se lo può pensare.

How will I greet him, with what words
will I rush to welcome my beloved,
who returns to me decked in glories so many
that the sun has (perhaps) never seen such a man?
What color – now of roses, now of violets –
will be mine? Which heart – still or trembling –
will I bear before that divine semblance
who makes me burn and fear at once?
Will I dare to throw these faithful arms
around that dear neck and raise
to his vibrant face my tremulous one?
Alas, as I suffer for so much love,
my heart, I fear, will dissolve in joy:
and whoever's felt this can well imagine.

The emotions and their affects, such as the recurring "tremante," are elaborated throughout the lines. How will she *speak* to her beloved when she comes *running* up to greet him? How will her *skin* change colour? And will she *throw* her arms around him? The poem thus represents a list of imagined physical, sensual experiences of a longed-for physical reunion with her beloved. In poem 102, the pleasure caused by the lovers' reunion gets more explicit. The tercets reads:

Sia ogni cosa in me di riso piena,
Poi che seco una schiera di diletti
A` star meco il mio Sol' almo rimena.
Sia la mia vita in mille dolci eletti
Piaceri involta, e tutta alma e serena,
E se stessa gioendo ogn'hor diletti.

> May everything in me be filled with laughter
>   now that my blessed sun returns to stay
>   with me, escorted by an army of delights.
> May my life be bundled into pleasures,
>   a thousand sweet ones, and serene and blessed
>   enjoy itself enjoying such delights.

The hyperbolic "in mille dolci eletti," reminiscent of Catullus' lines in Carmina 5 ("da mi basia mille" [give me a thousand kisses]), enforces the rhyming line "una schiera di diletti" in the previous tercet. Like Catullus, Stampa's poem is elegantly erotic: the thousand pleasures are all "alma e serena" but will fill "ogni cosa" in her and allow all of her to enjoy every delight. *Rime* 104, perhaps one of Stampa's most famous poems, represents the crescendo of the reunion, and a very explicit representation of a love meeting. It begins with praise to the night, more beautiful and brighter than any day, as it has allowed the lovers to embrace: "Tu de le gioie mie sola sei stata / Fida ministra, tu tutti gli amari / De la mia vita hai fatto dolci e cari, / Resomi in braccio lui, che m'ha legata" (you alone have been the faithful minister / of all my joys; all that was bitter / in my life you've rendered sweet and dear / and placed me in the arms of the man who bound me). In the tercets, the poetic I expresses her wish to have been as lucky as "La fortunata Alcmena" for whom Aurora (dawn) delayed her approach.

Stampa's view on the necessity of experiencing love through both the bodily senses and the soul, as shown in these examples, has clear parallels with Fontana's and d'Aragona's and, in a broader sense, with Epicurean ideas circulating in Italy. As discussed above, d'Aragona consistently defends physical desire and argues that love's infinity is caused by the always returning wish to unite with the beloved. Similarly, Stampa repeatedly returns to the body, the experience of physical emotions and love's affects in her *Rime*. Thus, since this kind of emphasis on the body was uncommon among both female Petrarchists and women writers more generally, I argue that such expressions can be viewed as "queer moments," to speak with Ahmed (2004), that allow the body – both male and female – to "impress differently on the world" of her lyrical poetry. Another way in which Stampa shapes such queer moments is when she enters into dialogue with the most dominant philosophical branch within Petrarchism, namely Neoplatonism.

Neoplatonic or Non-platonic?

In line with Petrarchan discourse, Stampa's lyrical collection contains several poems alluding to Neoplatonic ideals (Vernqvist 2020). However, in my view, these allusions are mainly strategic performative speech acts: Stampa rewrites them, subverts them or contradict their traditional meaning. In the following, I will focus on her use of the androgyne in poem 293, "Così m'impresse al core," which is of particular interest in this respect. The first two thirds of this poem underline the equality between the lovers in their new state as one soul in two bodies:

Così m'impresse al core
La beltà vostra Amor co' raggi suoi
Che di me fuor mi trasse, e pose in voi;
Hor, che son voi fatt' io,
Voi meco una medesma cosa sete;
Onde al ben', al mal mio,
Come al vostro pensar sempre devete;

Love has so impressed
onto my heart your beauty with his rays,
he's drawn me from myself and placed
me in you: thus I have
become you, and you and I are one and the same.
Whatever good is mine, or bad,
think of it always as your own –

The lovers are a perfect androgyne in a Neoplatonic sense, and the poem so far clarifies this shared, common state: they are not two separate beings but one sharing each other's pains and thoughts. When reaching the last three lines of the poem, however, Stampa challenges this idea of perfect love. The lyrical subject warns the beloved of the consequences to come if he fails to stay true due to his pride:

Ma pur, se al fin volete,
  Che'l vostro orgoglio la mia vita uccida,
  Pensate, che di voi sete homicida.

yet if that at the end you'll claim
  to use your pride to destroy my life,
  just realize you've committed suicide [or murder].

These lines suggest that the perfect union could only last if both parties continue to reciprocate each other's love, but if one of them turns away it will consequently lead to the splitting of the androgynous, perfect state. Notably, Ficino, in his *Sopra lo amore*, explains the justice of love with a formulation clearly known to Stampa: "L'uno e l'altro amando dà la sua: e riamando, per la sua restituisce l'Anima d'altri! Per la qual cosa per ragione debbe riamare qualunque è amato. E chi non ama l'Amante è in colpa di omicido" (Each man by loving gives up his own soul, and by loving in return restores the foreign soul through his own. Therefore, out of justice itself, whoever is loved ought to love the lover in return. But he who does not love his lover must be held answerable for murder) (Ficino 2003, 43; 1985, 56).

Thus, although Gaspara Stampa's choice of the word *homicida* may seem strong in the closed context of the madrigal, it makes sense if we read it through the context of and intertextual relations to works within the debate on love. Stampa is underlining the justice consequent upon unreciprocated love, as Ficino presented it. Due to the insistence on the lovers' previous perfect union, I also suggest that she adds to Ficino's judgement. In contrast to Ficino's utopian view of the union once realized, Stampa's poem underlines the union's instability. The lover's abandonment, which can be read as both physical and spiritual, is the cause of the lover's death. Her whole being would collapse, body and soul, because of the abandonment.

The intertextual parallel with Ficino is striking, but the actual philosophical meaning of Stampa's rewriting of the lines is closer to the poet and philosopher Sperone Speroni's and Tullia d'Aragona's respective dialogues on love. Stampa's argument is indeed a counterpart to that of Speroni's character Tullia, inspired by d'Aragona, in the dispute over the metaphor of the androgyne/hermaphrodite as a symbol for perfect love, revealing the utopian and unrealistic characteristics of the figure (Speroni, *Dialogo d'amore*, 1542; Leushuis 2017; Smarr 1998). However, Stampa's view has even more in common with d'Aragona's Epicurean-inspired philosophy. In the sequence of her dialogue discussed above, Tullia both confirms the force of bodily attraction and desire and reveals the impossibility of the idea of an ultimate union of two lovers. The union of the souls may only take place on an imaginative, intellectual level. However, since the physical desire of becoming completely united with the beloved can be satisfied only temporarily, it will always return. In a similar way, in Stampa's *Rime* 293 the androgynous state is only possible as long as the lovers' affection remains mutual. Thus, the actual experience of reciprocal love is necessary – a "body-mind" experience, to borrow Shusterman's (2006) words.

A Desire Should Not Be Censured

Finally, viewing sexuality as a natural desire, like hunger for food, Epicureans argued that physical desire should not be excluded but enjoyed within limits. In close similarity to these Epicurean ideals, d'Aragona compared sexual desire and pleasure to other pleasures, such as eating and drinking, which "deserves no censure," "but rather should be congratulated, because these processes restore the natural warmth and essential humours which maintain us in life" (1997, 94). This comparison is also present in Stampa's lyrical poetry, in *Rime* 175:

> Quasi huom, che rimaner dè tosto senza
> Il cibo, onde nudrir suol la sua vita,
> Più dell'usato à prenderne s' aita
> Fin, che gliè presso posto in sua presenza;
> Convien, ch'innanzi à l' aspra dipartenza,
> Ch'à sì crudi digiuni l'alma invita,
> Ella più de l'usato sia nodrita,
> Per poter poi soffrir sì dura assenza.
> Però vaghi occhi miei mirate fiso,
> Più de l'usato, anzi bevete il bene,
> E 'l bel del vostro amato e caro viso.
> E voi orecchie oltra l'usato piene
> Restate del parlar, che 'l Paradiso
> Certo armonia più dolce non contiene.
>
> Just as the man soon to be bereft
> of the food that nourishes his life
> will help himself to more than his wont
> as it's still there within his presence;
> so my soul faced with his bitter departure
> and the cruel fasting that's soon to come
> will long to eat more than it's accustomed
> to so it can endure his harsh absence.
> Thus, desiring eyes, fix your gaze on him
> more than you're wont – drink up all that's
> beautiful and good in your dear, beloved face.
> And you, ears, beyond your usual custom,
> stuff yourself with his speech – for paradise
> itself contains no sweeter harmonies.

The man eating more than enough because he knows that soon he will be deprived of food is comparable to the lover's reaction upon the beloved's departure. She knows that her desire is excessive, but to stay alive during the beloved's absence, she must consume as much as she can, drinking with her eyes, eating with

her ears, while the beloved is still present, or in other words, consume him with every sense. Thus, expressions of longing to be physically together with the beloved flow continuously through her *Rime* but this is never represented as a union of souls in heaven, as preferred by Petrarchists and Neoplatonists; rather, what is praised is the union of both body and soul down on earth. Stampa shows great awareness of the philosophical discourse on love of her time, and she benefits from this discourse in her creation of her philosophical poetry, mixing Neoplatonism, Aristotelianism and – as I have shown – Epicureanism, in which bodily experience and the sensual affects are needed to make sense of love.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed how Epicurean traces can be found in Lavinia Fontana's, Tullia d'Aragona's and Gaspara Stampa's work, all "thinking through the body" (Shusterman 2006, 17) when depicting the subversiveness of bodily pleasures, and, in Ahmed's formulation, showing that "knowledge is bound up with what makes us sweat, shudder, tremble, all those feelings that are crucially felt on the bodily surface, the skin surface where we touch and are touched by the world" (Ahmed 2004, 171). On that note, Stampa gets the final word on how the beloved's touch demonstrates the sense of the senses:

93
Egli è 'l Dittamo[11] mio, egli risana
  La piaga mia; e può far la mia sorte
  D'aspra e noiosa, dilettosa e piana

He's my miracle plant; one touch, my wound
  is healed, and he can turn my harsh, depressing fate
  into a life of pleasure and delight.

11 A plant with healing powers. See the *Aeneid* 12.411–415, where Venus heals Aeneas' wounds.

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Karine Durin

A Female Dissenter in Counter-Reformation Spain: Oliva Sabuco de Nantes, Between Epicureanism and Stoicism

The philosophical project developed by Oliva Sabuco de Nantes y Barrera (1562–1622) in her *Nueva filosofía de la naturaleza del hombre, no conocida ni alcançada de los grandes filósofos antiguos: la qual mejora la vida y salud humana* (*New Philosophy of Human Nature: Neither Known to nor Attained by the Great Ancient Philosophers, Which Will Improve Human Life and Health*), published in Madrid in 1587, is an example of dissent in multiple ways.[1] The treatise reveals a complex relationship with philosophical erudition that invites the reader to consider the legacy of Epicureanism and Stoicism in relation to the author's specific ideas on human nature. This chapter aims to demonstrate how Sabuco reformed medicine's relationship with health and illness by approaching these questions in a philosophical way that is both innovative and disruptive. According to Sabuco, self-knowledge is the starting point that leads to the knowledge of what she considers the pillars of health: the passions. As Sabuco shows, human passions are the site of exchanges and internal movements, as well as of multiple correspondences between the inner self, its natural, social and political environment, and its relationship to a larger macrocosm. Sabuco's text consists of seven parts, mostly in dialogue form.

This chapter will address the difficulty of separating Epicureanism and Stoicism in light of the medical experience developed in this treatise. The *New Philosophy of Human Nature* proposed a naturalistic approach to morality, as Sabuco sought to demonstrate the usefulness of natural history for self-knowledge and ethical living. I propose to analyze how the experience of nature (present in natural spaces and animal species) contributed to the definition of a new interpretation of subjectivity. As such, Epicureanism made it possible to understand the natural world and the self.

In this context, I will address the manner in which Sabuco dealt with the most controversial issues of Epicurean doctrine, specifically, divine providence and the immortality of the soul, by investigating her treatment of death in the book. The originality of Sabuco's philosophical reflection comes from the fact that

1 The title of the English edition comes from the first translation into English by Waithe, Comoler Vintró and Zorita, 2007.

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her conception of Stoicism remained closely linked to Epicureanism. Furthermore, the search for inner harmony leads Sabuco to consider ways of improving human existence in the world. In this way, political reflection moves her far beyond the doctrines that she had initially integrated, in order to highlight their limitations.

The Critical Reading of Authorities and the Rise of a Naturalistic Subjectivity

"How and why did a woman become a philosopher in the seventeenth century?" This question raised by Paula Findlen (2002, 186) is also relevant to the case of Oliva Sabuco de Nantes. The details of her existence are still a mystery. The *Nueva filosofía* is the sole work of a woman whose intellectual authority has for a long time been contested. The book, however, met with remarkable success, even during her lifetime, for a second edition appeared within a year of the 1587 edition in Madrid. Several sections of the original text were deleted by inquisitors in this second edition. However, a third edition appeared in Portugal, in 1622. The *Nueva filosofía* was included in the *Index librorum prohibitorum et expurgatorum* of 1632. The critical edition of the book published in Albacete in 2009 (Sabuco Álvarez 2009) reproduces the modifications mentioned in the Index while restoring the original edition. The pre-eminent philosopher and anatomist of the *Novator* movement, Martín Martínez, edited the text again in 1728, and the editorial success of Sabuco's text was constant until the end of the nineteenth century.[2] The first complete English edition, on the other hand, was not published until 2007.

Despite all this, Sabuco's authorship was denied by critics in the early twentieth century and the work was attributed to her father, Miguel Sabuco.[3] According to Waithe and Vintró's research (Waithe and Vintró 2003), this falsehood was originally promoted by her father himself, and was later supported by flawed arguments.

Regardless of the contested attribution, Oliva Sabuco represents the archetype of a learned Renaissance woman. Like other young female scholars of her

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2 For an overview of the editorial fortunes of the text, see Pomata 2010, 10–12. Pomata provided a translation of a part of the book, the dialogue *De vera medicina*. Among the recent studies on Sabuco's thought, see Caridad García Gómez 1992; *Al-Basit* 1987; Bidwell-Steiner 2012; Barbone 2015; Plastina 2019.

3 The authorship of the text was discussed by Hidalgo 1903. The defence of Oliva's authorship was the object of archival investigations conducted by Waithe and Vintró, 2003.

time, Oliva Sabuco did not pursue her studies outside the domestic sphere and did not frequent universities and other erudite circles. She grew up in Alcaraz, a city marked by the presence of *judeoconversos*, crypto-Jewish Christian converts. She received a sophisticated education within her family milieu, and developed her own personal curiosity and erudition over the years. She was strongly influenced by the humanist Pedro Simón Abril (1530–1595), teacher of grammar and rhetoric between 1578 and 1583 in Alcaraz. Strongly committed to the teaching of ancient philosophy, which he believed to be necessary for the "common good" (*la bienandanza de un pueblo*), he wrote a treatise on "rational philosophy," *Primera parte de la Filosofía llamada la Lógica racional o parte racional*, published in Alcalá de Henares in 1587, the same year as Oliva Sabuco's book.[4]

Oliva Sabuco's father, Miguel Sabuco, was a pharmacist and an expert in herbal medicine and botany. Through him she had access to the writings of physician and botanist Nicolás Bautista Monardes (1493–1588), who is quoted in her book. Recent scholarship has demonstrated that sixteenth-century Italian women were intimately involved in the apothecary trade as wives and daughters of apothecaries. Comparable studies are still lacking for early modern Spain, a context marked by a growing professional identity for pharmacists that would place them on an equal level with physicians: "The monarchy expanded the medical arena to include the professional activities of the apothecaries, spice merchants, and herbalists in the interest of preserving the public health. This expansion of royal authority also marked an important moment in the development of the professional identity of the apothecaries" (Clouse 2011, 114).

Nonetheless, the main motivation in Oliva Sabuco's learning was the search for human health through philosophical virtue, derived at least in part from her father's pharmaceutical culture. Sabuco sought to be a physician and a philosopher by intertwining two approaches to human nature, which was not in fact unusual at the time. As we shall see, she balanced an interest in the empirical knowledge of particulars with a conviction about the usefulness of medicine on a broader social level.

In Oliva Sabuco's view, self-knowledge is a remedy against the greatest evil, "violent death," which is caused by an illness of the soul reinforced by the uncontrolled power of the passions. Thus, the prolongation of life was at the centre of her intellectual project, which was at the same time philosophical, medical and political. All the dialogues that compose the book, however, lack erudite referen-

4 The complete title is *Primera parte de la Filosofía llamada la Lógica racional o parte racional, la qual enseña como ha de usar el hombre del divino y celestial don de la razon: assi en lo que pertenece a las ciencias, como en lo que toca a los negocios. Colegida de la dotrina de los Filósofos antiguos, y particularmente de Aristoteles*, Alcalá de Henares, 1587.

ces to its sources, except for Galen, Plato and especially Pliny the Elder. This choice corresponds to the search for a clear, readable, even didactic subject, judging by the dialogue structure and the use of the vernacular.

However, the main objective of the author consists in a re-foundation of medical knowledge based on a critical reading of ancient authorities:

> Y reciba V. M. este servicio de una mujer que, pienso es el mayor en calidad que cuantos han hecho los hombres, vasallos o señores, que han deseado servir a V.M. Y aunque su cesárea y católica Magestad tenga dedicados muchos libros de hombres, a lo menos de mujeres pocos y raros, y ninguno de esta materia. Tan estraño y nuevo es el libro cuanto es el autor. Trata del conocimiento de sí mismo y de la doctrina para conocerse y entenderse el hombre a sí mismo y a su naturaleza, y para saber las causas naturales por qué vive y por qué muere o enferma. (Sabuco 2009, 83)

> And may Your Majesty receive this pledge from a woman, for I think it is of higher quality than any others by men, by vassals, or by lords who had vowed to serve Your Majesty. And even if your Caesarean and Catholic Majesty has had many books dedicated to Him from men, only few and rare were from women, and none about this subject matter. This book is as unique and new as its author. It deals with the knowledge of one's self and presents a doctrine that enables humans to know and understand themselves and their nature and to learn about the natural causes by which they live and die or become ill. It has much noteworthy advice on how to avoid violent death. It improves the world in many ways. (Sabuco 2007, 44)

This critical position was developed further in one of her last dialogues, titled "Colloquy on Errors of Traditional Medicine." To what extent then could this quest for true medicine express heterodox ideas? Here, Sabuco presented her philosophy through an empirical and rationalistic approach, based on the connection between mind and body. In this manner, she affirmed the capacity of mind to develop all the ingredients necessary for physical health, not only of the individual, but also of the collectivity. She underlined the role of the mind in the acquisition of physiological and emotional equilibrium, similar to the Stoic thesis of the control of the passions derived from the idea of *ataraxia*, which was deeply rooted in the literary and philosophical culture of Renaissance Spain.

This new philosophy was nevertheless part of a deep-rooted movement of criticism of the authorities, which allowed for the expression of various positions that could go as far as heterodoxy. The denunciation of the errors of Galen and the Ancients, in Paracelsus for example, was in line with a current of contestation of Aristotelianism from the margins of the universities that had begun in the

early fourteenth century.[5] This critical movement had a broader European dimension as well, operating as a powerful force for the renewal of philosophical and scientific reflection on natural philosophy. It allows us to understand the development in Spain of an empiricist conception applied to natural things. Here, the empirical attitude favoured by the emergence of a conception of natural philosophy was marked, in a decisive manner, by a renewed reading of Pliny's *Natural History*, which henceforth provided the impetus for a progressive reversal of Aristotelianism, while at the same time expressing the search for other philosophical and scientific approaches that would accommodate the practical imperatives and the imperial aims of the Spanish monarchy.[6]

Oliva Sabuco's dispute with the ancient authorities begins with the emphatic affirmation of the possibility of empirical truth, probably inspired by Lucretius' words about relying on our own senses to distinguish between truth and falsehood and so attain certainty (Lucretius 2015, Book VI, lines 699–700). She repeatedly quotes Hippocrates, Galen and Pliny, in order to discuss the degree of legitimacy that could be attributed to philosophical and medical doctrines.

Prior to Sabuco, Antonio de Torquemada, author of the *Jardín de Flores curiosas* (Salamanca, 1570) described Pliny as a guide to the mysteries of nature:

> Él habla como buen filósofo conformándose con lo más posible y restringiendo los límites de naturaleza, como cosa de por sí sola, y no nascida y criada y conservada en la voluntad y mente divina, como vos en el principio de nuestra plática nos dijistes que lo decía Livino Lenio; que si por aquí nos guíamos más fácil se nos harían de créer estos misterios y maravillarse de las edades tan largas y entender los secretos de naturaleza más modernos (Torquemada 2012, 660).
>
> [He speaks as a good philosopher conforming himself to what is most possible and restricting the limits of nature, as a thing of itself, and not born and bred and preserved in the divine will and mind, as, in the beginning of our talk, you told us that Livinus Lemnius said; that if we were guided by this, it would be easier for us to believe these mysteries and wonder at the long ages and understand the more modern secrets of nature.][7]

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5 This empirical break seems to be particularly marked by the effects of the polemic opened by the Ferrara physician, philosopher and mathematician Niccolo Leoniceno (1428–1524) on the errors of Pliny. On the critical currents with regard to Aristotle's philosophy and their effects on the philosophies related to natural questions during the Renaissance, see Martin 2014, and Falcon 2005, in particular chap. 4: "The Limits of Aristotle's Science of Nature."

6 On the influence both in Spain and in Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo of the Italian polemic on the criticism of Pliny's errors, see Durin 2020.

7 Unless noted otherwise, all translations are mine.

Furthermore, Sabuco's dialogues in the *Nueva Filosofía* show a solid line of argumentation that defines in an entirely novel manner the relationship between philosophy and medicine, moving far beyond the traditional books on recipes and secrets or *arcana* that constituted the main production of female writers in the Renaissance.[8] For this reason, the *Nueva filosofía* can be placed within the tradition of treatises on the nature of man that flourished during the Renaissance. The popularity of the subject was first linked to the diffusion of translations and abridgements of the *Theologia naturalis* (1434–1436) by the Spanish monk Raymond of Sabunde. Three adaptations of Sabunde's work circulated under different titles: *Lumbre del alma* (1542); *Despertador del alma* (Seville, 1544); and *Violeta del ánima*, a 1549 translation into Spanish of Petrus Dorlandus' abridgement *Viola animae sive De Natura hominis* (published in Latin in 1499), and consisting of seven dialogues. They were sometimes followed by an added dialogue on the Passion of Christ, which made it a source of spiritual literature in the sixteenth century, combining an emphasis on the dignity of man with self-knowledge, with the aim of leading man out of his misery by giving him a glimpse of perfection (Bujanda 1974, 78–84).

This form of self-knowledge, whose purpose is spiritual and religious, is quite different from that espoused by Sabuco. Rather than following the lead of Sabunde and the Christian philosopher Nemesius (c. 400 AD) who inspired him, Sabuco's ideas have certain similarities with the school of Italian philosophers of nature, from a generation of medical authors who were highly critical of Galen, such as Agostino Doni (*De natura hominis libri duo*, Basel, 1581), pupil of Bernardino Telesio (*De rerum natura iuxta propria principia*, Naples, Iosephus Cachius, 1570). Sabuco concurred with them in discussing the naturalist and materialist components of the contemporary reading of Galen, in order to show the erosion of Scholasticism. This medico-philosophical turn affirmed the corporeality of the body based on a knowledge of anatomy as the basis for understanding the nature of the soul, and of humanity. Fabrizio Bigotti (2019, 145) has described the various approaches employed by authors to achieve this end:

> The study of human nature within a naturalistic frame, the rejection of the universal species, the deconstruction of the Aristotelian theory of essence [. . .] the replacement of *mens* with *ingenium* and the thesis that it is impossible to demonstrate the immortality of the soul on the basis of natural philosophy alone.

In Sabuco's case, this line of thought was defined by the reduction of physical functions to the corporeal dimension of the human body. There might be a direct

8 The case of Sabuco is different from the practices discussed in Ray 2015.

link here with the Italian naturalism of the Paduan school, like that of Doni and Telesio, and there certainly is one with the Spanish medical thinker Huarte de San Juan. For all of those authors, the study of anatomy became the point of departure for a renewed critique of Galen that led to a "naturalization of the soul and somatization of the mind," as Bigotti asserts (2019, 52–53). In situating the soul within the brain, "Prince of this house" according to the translation by Gianna Pomata (Sabuco 2010, 4), and not in the heart, Oliva Sabuco established a link with the "encephalocentric" tradition developed by the Italian naturalism of Renaissance philosophy, which, by the second half of the sixteenth century, was already departing from the influence of Galen's texts. Although she is not mentioned in the scholarship on the subject, Sabuco nevertheless participated in this evolution whereby psychic functions were conceived as bodily functions.

The originality of her proposal is affirmed in the way the brain is treated, and the emphasis on materiality is further affirmed by the powerful organic and vital role played by the *chilo*, chyle. This substance, also referred to by the author as *jugo blanco*, white juice, participates in the vital energy of the organism, *sangre blanca*, white blood, with its nutritive function, which concerns human or animal species, man or woman, without distinction. Its importance in Sabuco's text reveals a major difference with Galen, since the power of the blood is minimized by this new conception of inner nutrition. Defined in terms of a plant metaphor, the *chilo*, also named "the white chyle of nutrition," is used to describe a system of circulation that "increases and nourishes the species":

> Avicena dijo que, fuera de los cuatro humores, había otras cuatro que llamó segundas humedades: a las cuales nombró por restos cuatro nombres; *Ros*, *cambium*, *gluten*, *humor in extremitatibus* [. . .] Veis aquí (señor Doctor) el jugo blanco o quilo o licor o sangre blanca que yo digo hallo que envía el cerebro y hace el nutrimento de todas las partes del cuerpo (Sabuco 2009, 320).

> Avicenna said that besides the four humors, there are four others, which he called second moistures, and to which he gave the following names: *ros, cambium, gluten, humor in extremitatibus*. [. . .] These moistures, Mr. Doctor, are no other than the substance I discovered and speak of, namely, the white juice, or chyle or liquor or white blood, sent by the brain to nourish all the parts of the body. (Sabuco 2010, 206)

Sabuco therefore argues that the two fundamental "roots" are the brain and the stomach. In her subsequent considerations on the health and dietetic health of kings, she declares:

> Y así digo que los reyes tienen más necesidad de esta Filosofía, que por esta razón tienen más enfermedades, porque la causa de ellas es aquí en esta raíz donde pasa esto mediante el ánima y las especies aborrecidas y desechadas, y no en el hígado ni humor ni cor-

> azón incapaces de especies. [. . .] Los médicos sienten que la raíz que alimenta el cuerpo es el estómago, y así le llamó Platón: pesebre de todo el cuerpo, lo cual es así, porque la raíz principal que alimenta y vegeta todo el cuerpo, es el cerebro; y el estómago es una segunda raíz, o seno, que produce la otra para depositar y meter dentro de ella el alimento, como los simios, esfingidos y sátiros lo meten primero en las mejillas, para comer después, y el ave onocrótalo en su seno (como está dicho). (Sabuco 2009, 329).

> Therefore, I say that kings stand more in need of my philosophy, because for this reason they have more diseases, whose cause is in the brain, where the soul reacts to the "species" of repulsive and loathed objects. The cause is neither in the liver, nor in the humor, nor in the heart, none which is able to perceive the species. [. . .] The physicians think that the root that feeds the body is the stomach, and Plato called it "the manager of the whole body" but such is not the case. The principal root that feeds the whole body and makes it grow is the brain. The stomach is only a second root and cavity, made by the brain in order to store the food, just as some apes, the dog-headed apes and the orangutangs, store food first in the recesses of their jaws in order to eat later, and the pelican stores its pouch, as has been said. (Sabuco 2010, 220)

The primacy of the brain and the absence of references to the soul or spirit could easily justify the censorship of certain parts of the text of the 1587 and 1588 editions in the *Index of Prohibited Books* of 1632. At any rate, the *Nueva filosofía* made a relevant contribution to the reintroduction of Epicureanism in studies on Natural Philosophy, and to a naturalization of Christian morality. The naturalization of spiritual and moral goals is based on this materialistic and functional conception of the brain.

Furthermore, the *Nueva filosofía* is ambivalent with respect to the tradition of ancient Stoicism. It was impossible for Sabuco to exclude the passions from her reflections on health, or the world, as shown in the first dialogue, "Knowledge of One's Self," or in the "Dialogue on the True Medicine":

> Tercera [*proposición*]. Los afectos del alma causan principalmente la vida, la muerte o la enfermedad al hombre, en los cuales es hombre.
>
> Cuarta. La causa y oficina de los humores de toda enfermedad es el cerebro. Allí están los afectos, pasiones y movimientos del ánima, allí el sentir o sensación, allí la raíz y la naturaleza que hace la vegetación, allí la vida y anhelación. (Sabuco 2009, 253)

> [Third] the feelings of the soul – wherein is the humanity of man – are the primary cause of man's life, death, and sickness.
>
> Four, the brain is the cause and workshop of all diseases and humors. There, in the brain, reside the feelings, passion, and motions of the soul; there is the seat of sense perception; there is the root and the natural faculty or part of the soul which is the agent of growth; there are life and breathing. (Sabuco 2010, 101)

The search for happiness cannot be exclusively intellectual, and must take into account our knowledge of nature. By focusing on interiority and subjectivity Sab-

uco entered into a discussion with Stoicism. If Stoicism was a philosophy of man and the search for control and dominion, she adapted it to her naturalism by examining the vices and virtues as elements of natural philosophy. The culmination of this process became radical when she declared "el entendimiento potencia orgánica" [the mind an organic faculty]. The soul is considered a part of the body, anchored in the body as its root.

Epicureanism through the Animal, and Death

But what was Sabuco's objective in pursuing this naturalization of morals? This question leads us to an explanation of the exact nature of her empiricism. The importance of the animal in Sabuco's work invites a comparison with how the subject was developed, before her, by the physician-philosopher Antonio Gómez Pereira, author of *Antoniana Margarita* (Medina del Campo, 1554) and *Nova veraque medicina* (1558)[9] – a comparison all the more illuminating because the positions of the two natural philosophers are so antithetical. The history of the reception of *Antoniana Margarita* has been the subject of controversy since its publication, as shown by the edition of García Valverde (2019). The "Objections of Licenciate Miguel de Palacios, Professor of Sacred Theology in the University of Salamanca, to Several of the Many Paradoxes in *Antoniana Margarita* and in Their *Defense*" (Gómez Pereira 2019, 1157) concerns the "Proof that brute beasts lack sensory perception" (Gómez Pereira 2019, 197). His argument on animals, that "they have proved that they have no sensory perception" (Gómez Pereira 2019, 209), was probably influenced by the work of anatomist Andreas Vesalius (1514–1564).[10] Taking an opposite approach, Sabuco seems to rely on the example of Pliny to contradict Gómez Pereira's claim. The reference to the ingenuity of aquatic creatures (shellfish) in Pliny's book 9, and of elephants and snakes, book 8, allows Sabuco to summon animals, in all their forms, at any moment in her

9 Lynn Thorndike commented on the use of novelty in the titles of scientific works on the threshold of the seventeenth century: "Such titles became [. . .] more repetitious and even stereotyped [. . .] fomented by growing opposition to Aristotle and scholasticism and the tendency toward a modern philosophy, by the Paracelsian revival of the later sixteenth century with its three principles instead of four elements [. . .] and by the increasing interest in the experimental method" (Thorndike 1951, 584–585).

10 Vesalius' works began to be disseminated in Spain during the reign of Philip II, particularly with the examination of animals based on dissection and the renewal of anatomical knowledge. The work of José López Piñero on "The Vesalian Movement in Sixteenth-Century Spain" is essential on this topic (Piñero 1979). See also Catani and Sandrone 2015, 208, and Antonio Martín Ara-

discourse, and provides an excellent opportunity to bring in a familiar image which, of course, recalls the *exempla* of the tales specific to the medieval corpus. The familiarity of the images and references thus reinforces the task of didactic popularization of the discourse, further facilitated by its vernacular articulation of the scientific questions addressed. Reading Pliny's *Natural History* was a pleasant and popular pastime in the sixteenth century, especially in European court circles.

In Sabuco, as in Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo in the same period, Pliny is a common source for upholding the primacy of experience, for questioning the knowledge of authorities. But Sabuco's *Nueva filosofía* does not present any practical cases that would justify the idea of a medical empiricism. Pliny is the mediator of this more familiar kind of empiricism, which is related to a literature of *exempla* whose function is didactic as well as illustrative. The *exempla* take the place of the images that frequently illustrated medical texts.

In addition, given the considerable importance of Pliny, cited almost a hundred times in the texts that form the *Nueva filosofía*, a probable knowledge of the writings of Conrad Gessner (1516–1565) should be considered in the conception of the work. The Zurich physician published the first volume of his encyclopaedic *Historiae animalium* in Zurich in 1551, and further volumes appeared until 1558. The works of the Zurich polymath circulated in Spain, both the *Historiae animalium* and the *Thesaurus de remedis secretis* (1554), which was widely distributed in sixteenth-century Europe. Repeatedly republished in Europe from Lyon to Venice, there were nearly 27 editions before 1600 and translations into Italian, French and English. The curiosity and erudition of Oliva Sabuco may justify the hypothesis of Gessner's influence on the new way of thinking about medicine that Sabuco developed in her work. Conrad Gessner was known in Spain, but references to him were not always explicit for religious reasons.

At any rate, the recurrent sympathy created by the mirror that the animal provides for the human mind places the passions and emotions in a naturalistic perspective:

> Odio natural se dice por la contrariedad y diferencia que tiene un hombre a otro en complexion, condiciones, virtudes y vicios y por la contrariedad de las estrellas y signos en que nacieron. Este odio natural es de la sensitiva. Tiénenlo muchos animales unos con otros. (Sabuco 2009, 108)

> Natural hatred is related to the discrepancies and differences that one man has toward another due to race, social status, and virtues and vices and by the fate of the stars or signs

guz: "*Antoniana Margarita* (1554) is the first attempt to explain brain functioning by excluding the Galenic concepts of 'soul' and 'spirit'" (2022, 10).

> under which they were born. This natural hatred comes from the sensitive soul and is borne by many animals against one another. (Sabuco 2007, 59).

The *Nueva filosofía* is ambiguous regarding classical Stoicism. On the one hand, Sabuco considered it impossible to exclude the influence of passion when reflecting on physical health, which, in turn, underlined the importance of knowledge about physical nature. On the other hand, her debate with Stoicism was centred on subjectivity, and the interiorization of knowledge. If Stoicism was a philosophy based on the quest for self-control, Sabuco linked it with her naturalism in examining vice and virtue as the main elements of her natural philosophy. For example, concerning mercy:

> *Título XV. Afecto de misericordia, que hace este daño.* Como la misericordia sea pena y dolor de la miseria ajena, también derriba jugo del cerebro y lo hace viciosos a más y menos, y así mueve lágrimas y se amortecen y vienen síncopas y grandes daños, como de ver curar un herido, ver matar a otro y aun de ver matar un animal viene grande daño en la manera dicha a mozos y mozas tiernas. Siéntese en los muslos porque lo que cae del cerebro va por aquel lugar. Esta misericordia podrían aprender los hombres de algunos animales y aves que mantienen y regalan a sus padres en la vejez, como de las cigüeñas y de un género de ratones que cuenta Plinio [Lib.8.c.57]. (Sabuco 2009, 111)

> 15. *Excessive Compassion.* Compassion causes me sorrow and pain from others' miseries. But humans should learn how to be compassionate from certain animals. According to Pliny, animals such as storks and a type of mouse maintain and cajole their parents at old age. But compassion can also draw down brain fluid and make it more or less vicious, depending upon the extent of the compassion, bringing tears, or even making people faint and even comatose. (Sabuco 2007, 61)

These moral notions are questioned in the light of the body, the brain and the passions. Her conclusions on this matter are radical indeed, for she declared the mind an organic faculty, "el entendimiento potencia orgánica," and considered that the health of the soul is inextricably linked to the health of the body. Thus, passions are at the root of all illness and malady. In consequence, Sabuco eluded and rejected any idea of a conflict and opposition (*discordia*) between the soul and the body by making the passions the keystone of their union. The search for concord is significantly marked by the presence of two balanced positions (by Antonio and Veronio) expressed in the form of the fictional dialogue, a genre that provides a vehicle for the expression of the author's philosophical ideas:

> *Antonio.* El principal y general remedio de la *vera medicina* es componer el ánima con el cuerpo y quitar la discordia y descontento con las razones del segundo remedio, y confortar el cerebro con las tres columnas o emprentas que dijimos: las dos espirituales, alegría, contento y placer (que todo es uno), y esperanza de bien, las cuales dos columnas, porque son

> espirituales del alma no se pueden poner ni aplicar con otra cosa principalmente si no es con palabras, aunque también se pueden poner con obras exteriores aunque sean fingidas y no de veras. De manera que os doy la primera regla general, que es ésta. El mejor medicamento o remedio es palabras y obras que en los adultos engendran alegría y esperanza de bien. Luego confortaréis el cerebro con la tercera columna, que es confortación y buen concierto de la segunda armonía del estómago con las cosas confortativas el estómago y medicamentos que lo conciertan, como adelante se dirá. Confórtase también la raíz principal del cerebro con sus confortativos, y especial con buen olor y música. (Sabuco 2009, 227)

> *Antonio.* The most important and basic remedy of *Proper Medicine* is to harmonize the soul [*el ánima*] with the body, to remove discord and discontent by using the reasoning of the second remedy, and to comfort the brain through the three pillars of health [. . .] we have mentioned. There are the two [pillars]: joy [*alegría*], contentment [*contento*] or pleasure [*placer*] (which are one and the same), and optimism [*esperanza de bien*]. Because both pillars are spiritual, [coming] from the soul, they cannot [usually] be expressed nor exercised through any means other than through words. However, it is also possible to exercise them through other external actions, even when those actions are not real, but only fake. Therefore, I give you the first rule, which is as follows: The best prescription or cure is words and actions, which in adults bring joy and optimism [*alegría y esperanza de bien*]. Right after this, you should comfort the brain using the third pillar of health, which is the soothing and internal concord of the second, i.e., the digestive system, by using things that give comfort to the stomach and [using] medicines that provide internal concord to it, as we will discuss later. You should also comfort the primary "root" or the brain with what comforts it, especially with good scent and music. First Basic Rule to Conserve Health: The Three Pillars of Health. (Sabuco 2007, 158)

Sabuco considered sadness the most damaging of all passions. In contrast, happiness ("placer, alegría, contento") appeared as the source of physical health and well-being, leading to a redefinition of the very concept of health. It is worth mentioning that this relationship was expressed in very similar terms by the naturalist Luigi Luisini (*De compescendis animi affectibus*, Basel, 1562), who commented on the remedies of consolation to avoid excessive passion:

> [. . .] keeping a safe distance from the wrathful subject, removing from his grasp any tools he may be brandishing [. . .] while sadness is prevented by inviting the patient to ponder the question of the *non hoc tibi soli*, coupling this contemplation with activities such as strolling in parks and sunny places, gratifying the five senses, engaging in pleasing conversation and taking tonics specific to each of main organs. (Bigotti 2019, 100)

Sabuco further explained how to dispel the turmoil with arguments that recall the views of Luisini:

> *Título VI. De la ira y su remedio la insinuación retórica.* Sí hay [remedios], como es luego gargarizar con agua fría y vinagre blanco aguado, comer el jugo de cosas agras y no beber vino ni comer hasta ser pasada la alteración, tomar buen olor, la eutrapelia de un buen

> amigo (que es buena conversación) y con él salirse al campo donde el movimiento de los árboles y el suave ruido del agua se oiga. La música también es eficacísimo remedio que quita el daño que el enojo está haciendo, como los mordidos de las tarántulas sanan bailando a buena música y no con otra cosa y, si falta la música, mueren luego. (Sabuco 2009, 100)

> *6. Rage and Its Remedy, Rhetorical Insinuation.* [Remedies] Yes there are, such as gargling right away diluted white vinegar, drinking tart juices, avoiding wine, not eating until the commotion is over, using scents, enjoying the intimacy of a good friend's conversation [*la eutrapelia de un buen amigo*] and going with him to the countryside where the rustling of the trees and the murmur of the water can be heard. Music is also a very effective remedy against the harm that anger is producing. (Sabuco 2007, 54)

The connection between *Temperamenta* and *mores*, inspired by Galen, justified this approach. But for Sabuco, above all, it was the longing for the hope of good, *la esperanza de bien*, that constituted the most important component of physical health (Sabuco 2007, 140). The *Título XXV* insists on this point:

> *Título XXV. Afecto de esperanza de bien. Avisa que esperanza de bien es una columna que sustenta la salud del hombre y hace todas las obras humanas.* La esperanza de bien es la que sustenta (como una columna) la salud y vida humana y gobierna el mundo, la que hace todas las cosas de este mundo. Ninguna cosa mueve al hombre sino la esperanza de bien. Todas las acciones y obras exteriores e interiores las hace esperanza de bien. Ésta da salud, como la quita su contraria. Con ésta vive el hombre y sin ella no quiere la vida. Ésta da alegría, contento, fuerzas y aliento para cualquier trabajo. (Sabuco 2009, 122)

> 25. *Optimism, a Pillar of Health.* Like a pillar, optimism sustains health and human life. It guides everyone and makes anything possible. Nothing else motivates humans like optimism. All external and internal acts and functions are based on it. Optimism produces health just as its opposite takes it away. With optimism, humans live; without it, they do not want life. It brings happiness and merriment, strength and courage for any task. (Sabuco 2007, 68)

Thus, hope was presented by Sabuco as a virtue capable of directly affecting the body, even capable of overcoming all discord and imbalance between body and soul:

> *Veronio.* Decís, señor Antonio, que el hombre él mismo se mata con sus afectos y deleites. Dadme algún remedio cómo me escaparé yo de ese mal tan común y ladrón de casa.

> *Antonio.* Usando de todos los avisos que por todo el libro están sembrados, y lleva éstos en la memoria.
>
> Las armas de la muerte y de la fortuna adversa son tristezas y pesares que el hombre se toma; éstas conoce para que te sepas guardar de ellas.
>
> No entristecerse con el mal es vencer a la fortuna adversa y quitarle sus armas y poder.

> El temor es mayor mal que la cosa temida cuando llega; por tanto en el miedo o esperanza dudosa de gran aventura usa de razones del ánima: lo que es ya es y ya no puede dejar de ser y lo que ha de ser no lo puedo yo deshacer; de balde me fatigo y añado otro mal mayor; y usa de la prevención esperando siempre lo peor.
>
> El mal futuro inminente desasosiega y da fatiga al prudente, el hecho ya y pasado, al imprudente.
>
> Ni amarás ni desearás ni estimarás en mucho ninguna cosa porque los deseos y sus fines, los deleites humanos, más prometen en la imaginación que dan en el acto porque ninguna consistencia tienen, por tanto júzgalos sabiamente por pasados. (Sabuco 2009, 242)
>
> *Veronio.* You argue, Antonio, that humans kill themselves because of their emotions and excesses in pleasures. Tell me some remedy for escaping this general threat and house-thief.
>
> *Antonio.* By using all the recommendations that are explained throughout this entire book and carrying them in your memory. The weapons of death and adverse fortune are the sorrows and worries that humans inflict upon themselves. Learn about them in order to protect yourself against them.
>
> Not becoming affected by sadness caused by vice is a way of conquering adverse fortune and disarming its power. Dread is an evil worse than the arrival of what is dreaded. So, when in dread and doubtful, hope for the great to happen: use the reasoning of the soul. Say to yourself: *What is already is and cannot be changed, and I cannot change what happens, so, there is no point in worrying about it and adding to it another, greater harm.* So it is good as a preventive measure to always anticipate the worst. The imminent future harm disturbs and exhaust the prudent person; the harm already past is disturbing only to the imprudent.
>
> You should not love, desire, or long too much for anything because humans' desires, goals, and pleasures promise more to the imagination than they really grant, since they are unfounded. So it is better to consider them past. (Sabuco 2007, 172).

This passage introduces the conclusion of her work. It also marks a narrative turn towards a more aphoristic style, in the manner of Hippocrates' aphorisms, and presents an invitation to escape: to escape the pleasure of the flesh, and of idleness, in order to allow the body and soul to engage in a permanent transformation towards virtue as an improving principle. These passages demonstrate Sabuco's faith in a universal, cosmic order, that might allow mankind to be cured of all illness and suffering without medicine, through the practice of virtue and the hope of good (*esperanza del bien*). She reaffirmed the power of wisdom to interact with the physical body, and the capacity of an autonomous mind to act as a guide in all matters regarding the conduct of life:

> En toda disminución, que es la enfermedad, espera el aumento, que es la salud, pues estar quedo no puede, porque siempre imita y sigue a la naturaleza de sol y luna, padre y madre, los cuales nunca en aumento ni disminución paran, ni pueden estar quedos: el uno se pasa y el otro se sigue. Espéralo con las reglas, remedios y dietas dichas, que así lo hace la gente chínica y sarracénica sin médico. (Sabuco 2009, 244)

> During every decrement (*decremento*), i.e., the times of illness, wait for the increment (*incremento*) that is health. Do this because your body cannot remain static. It imitates the nature of the sun and moon, father and mother, which never stop during increment or decrement. Nor can they stay still; one passes over and the other one follows. While waiting, use the guidelines, remedies, and diets mentioned here: this is the way practiced by the Chinese and the Saracens, who did not have physicians. (Sabuco 2007, 173)

In Sabuco's thought, the role of imagination is decisive in the process of physical deterioration and degradation created by passion. The Word, employed in an original way as the power of rhetorical insinuation to subdue rage and anger, is presented as a remedy against moral evil, and physical sickness.[11] Thus, philosophy is presented as the best of doctors, which, in turn, takes us back to the influence of Galen, in particular his treatise *The Best Doctor Is also a Philosopher*, written at the end of his life. The autonomy achieved through the subject's self-knowledge leads to postponing death by defining the terms and conditions of one's own health. This explains the notable absence of any metaphysical consideration of the immortality of the soul. Death is seen only as a matter of sudden passing away, fought against by the search for the conditions that make longevity possible. Contrary to the theories of the time, the notion of self-care is presented as a direct cause of longevity and the anatomy of the passions is the key to this way of counteracting death.

The Pursuit of Harmony

The relationship between the macrocosm and the microcosm is present throughout all of Sabuco's work, and I would now like to suggest a social and political interpretation of this crucial aspect of her writing, derived from the fact that the book was dedicated to King Philip II.

The pursuit of the *esperanza del bien* represents the foundation of the legitimacy of natural philosophy in all political matters. If Sabuco's text approximates the style of utopia in its consideration of the causes that make possible the improvement of things in this world, "las cosas que mejorarán este Mundo y sus repúblicas," the *esperanza del bien* extends the subject to a reflection that goes beyond doctrinal affinities and leads to the consideration of a social dimension that contains within it the notion of good. In this sense, the author is particularly

11 The *Nueva filosofía* refers to the rhetoric of *insinuatio*, "a dissimulatory mode of *captatio benevolentiae*, [. . .] defined by Cicero in *De Inventione* 1.20 as 'an address which by dissimulation and indirection unobtrusively steals into the mind of the auditor'" (Sinclair 2020, 432).

attentive to the work on the land as a solution to poverty, so as to valorize the peasants, *labradores*, who feed humanity. Thus, Sabuco's text may echo contemporary issues raised by the so-called *arbitristas* – a group of reformist thinkers – in this period.[12] In that case, one should also consider the proximity of her reform ideas to the influence of agrarian *arbitrismo* (Gómez Cornejo Aguado 2018). The term *remedio*, so frequently used by Sabuco, may justify this connection with the spirit of *arbitrismo* summarized in the expression "suplir necesidades y remediar faltas" [providing for needs and remedying deficiencies].[13] Conversely, the analogy with the medical body and the medical metaphor are deeply embedded in the political and empirical vocabulary of the diagnosis made by *arbitristas*.[14]

A clearly social orientation of the *Nueva filosofía* thus puts forward, at the end of the author's reflection and in the subsequent dialogues, the notion of public health, *salud pública*. From this perspective, Sabuco distinguished herself from other Renaissance writers, especially the Italian naturalists, in the sense that she sought to insinuate a civic humanism that could be used to influence worldly politics. The idea of reforming the republics of the world, "reformar las Repúblicas del mundo," is present throughout her work as a potential application of her philosophical thought, in close connection with the tradition of Spanish *arbitrismo*. Here her objective becomes to limit corruption, to protect the work of the peasants who sustain the world (los *labradores* "que sustentan el mundo"), in order to combat misery and social degradation through a just distribution of resources, as well as importing novel species from the Indies ("traer algunas plantas de Indias").[15]

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12 "The late 1580s and the 1590s seem in retrospect the critical years: the years of reverses in Spain's north European policies, of another 'bankruptcy,' in 1597, of the death of the old king himself in 1598 and of the famine and plague which swept through Castile and Andalusia at the end of the century" (Elliott 1977, 46).

13 A sentence by Diego de Covarrubias, *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española*, 1611.

14 "Your Majesty is the doctor of this republic, and your vassals are sick," wrote Jerónimo de Ceballos in 1623, quoted in Elliott 1977, 49.

15 In this respect, the pharmaceutical and empirical experience of the author of the *Nueva filosofía* should not be forgotten. As James Shaw and Evelyn Welch (2011) noted for Italy, some of the most diverse commodities were sold in apothecaries: "local perfumeries, distilleries, wine-shops, pigment factories." The preparation of spice mixtures was very profitable for Renaissance pharmacists. See Clouse 2011, chap. 4: "The Apothecary's Profession: Cooperation and Professionalization," about apothecaries and market activities.

Conclusion

For Oliva Sabuco, natural philosophy represented an essential step towards individual self-knowledge, but also an instrument for a new way of thinking about the relationship between body and mind, which, in turn, had potential social and political implications. This constituted the essential message of her *Nueva filosofía*, based on the possibility of balancing the teachings of ancient authorities with Christian doctrine. In her work, Epicureanism and Stoicism are not considered as potential opponents. Thus, in Sabuco's work, natural philosophy represents the possibility of creating a discourse full of potential for the critique of ancient doctrines and dogma, but also capable of integrating the tradition of natural philosophy with Christian faith.[16]

Sabuco's Epicureanism can thus be situated within an idea of natural philosophy that could have a positive effect on the relation between body and soul, cosmos and politics, derived from intellectual reflection and the conduct of life, according to a definition of virtue that emphasizes the connections between ancient authorities and Christian thought, significantly enriched by the concepts of happiness and joy. For Sabuco, the liberating effect of happiness could be extended to social life, through its political application, especially in her "Tratado de las cosas que mejorarán este Mundo y sus Repúblicas" [Treatise on things that will improve this world and its republics]. Without any doubt, this last aspect of Oliva Sabuco's philosophy surpassed by far its own Epicurean foundations, inspired by an ethic of balance of the passions and a conception of the body that other natural philosophers were envisaging in the same period.

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16 The same attitude was already present in Galen: "He refuses to take sides in many contemporary philosophical debates, on the eternity of the world, the nature of the soul, or the nature of the divine, because he can see no way in which one can reach a secure conclusion" (Nutton 2020, 79).

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Nan Gerdes

Epicurean Virtues for a Post-Heroic Age? Tracing the Critique of Heroism in Antoinette Deshoulières' Poetry and Drama

French poet and dramatist Antoinette Deshoulières (1638–1694) developed a philosophically informed critique of heroism in the late seventeenth century, as the relatively limited scholarship about her has not failed to comment on in relation to her poetry (Conley 2002; Tonolo 2010). In other connections, some scholars also mention Deshoulières as a supporter of the modern party in the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns, a view that I wish to nuance by placing it in connection with her critique of heroism (Conley 2002; Tonolo 2010; Taylor 2016). If Deshoulières directs her critique of heroism against the human drive to immortalize one's name, and if supporters of the ancient and the modern party clashed over the permanence of cultural models from antiquity, this evinces that the two topics connect through the larger issue of temporality.[1] Whereas questions about Deshoulières' relationship with Christianity are not in focus in this chapter (Deshoulières both challenged Christian dogma and reconciled with the Church), her legacy from and treatment of classical antiquity is. Greco-Roman antiquity plays a central role both in relation to seventeenth-century heroism and in the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns. Moreover, making the topic of temporality the overarching theme of this chapter allows me to relate Deshoulières' work to her post-*Fronde*, absolutist context. Importantly, a main goal of this chapter is to show that if we wish to understand Deshoulières' treatment of the relation between classical past and modernity, analysis should not stop at her poetry. I propose that including her often ignored tragedy *Genséric* (1680) in the discussion benefits our understanding of how her gloomy treatment of heroism relates to a modern sense of time. In conclusion, I turn to Deshoulières' poetry about nature to show that if she rejects the permanence of ancient cultural models, she nevertheless envisions naturally eternal models in nature.

1 I am using the term "temporality" in a broad sense to signify the relation to time, but also more narrowly as temporariness as opposed to infinity.

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A Modern Praise of Kingship

An encomiastic vein in Deshoulières' poetry often goes unmentioned in scholarly treatments of her critique of heroism. Giving due attention to Deshoulières' panegyrics to the king, Volker Schröder cautions that it would be futile and anachronistic to question the degree of sincerity in her admiration for Louis XIV (Schröder 2019, 103). For sure, Deshoulières' biography reflects the transition in French society from the conflicts of the *Fronde* to the consolidation of Louis as an absolutist king. Deshoulières belonged to the nobility, and her parents were Catholics and loyal to the king. Her marriage at age thirteen however relates her through her husband to the *frondeurs*. He was a protestant officer, fighting for the Great Condé in Rocroi. Dramatic events there and in Belgium ultimately led to the couple's reconciliation with Louis XIV, occasioned by Antoinette. The king made her husband governor of Sète, while she devoted herself more to her writings as an important participant in Parisian salon culture. Deshoulières' first encomiastic poem to royalty dates from 1682 (Tonolo 2010, 13). Thus, praise of the king did not appear in her very early work, which the prince of Condé (whom the king had pardoned in 1659) may however have supported, and her freethinking has been related to the *Fronde* (Tonolo 2010, 13, 37). The year before her death, Deshoulières obtained a much-needed royal pension, reflecting the king's recognition of her work.

Deshoulières' panegyrics offer some useful indications about how she fashions her present in relation to antiquity. Her praise of Louis XIV renders him a hero who surpasses any other hero in history. For instance, his "exploits d'immortelle mémoire" [deeds for eternal recollection], make him "passer les antiques Héros" [surpass the heroes from antiquity] (Deshoulières 2010, 109).[2] As the king's victories made France the leading power in Europe, Louis' rule becomes comparable to that of the Roman emperor Augustus, an example often considered unsurpassable, as Deshoulières notes in her *Ode au roi*, *Ode to the king*:

> [. . .] dans un Siècle heureux on vit régner Auguste,
> Son nom fut adoré de cent Peuples divers.
> Il était comme toi, sage, intrépide, juste,
> Et tu fais comme lui trembler tout l'Univers.
> (Deshoulières 2010, 156)

> [[. . .] In the happy era when Augustus reigned,
> a hundred different nations admired his name.

2 Unless otherwise indicated, translations into English are mine. My translations are literal translations.

> He was like you wise, fearless, just,
> and like him you make the whole universe shake.]

Deshoulières' ode precedes Charles Perrault's poem, *Le Siècle de Louis le Grand*, of 1687. His verses, such as "[e]t l'on peut comparer sans craindre d'être injuste / Le Siècle de Louis au beau Siècle d'Auguste" [and one can compare without fearing to be unjust / the era of Louis to the beautiful era of Augustus], famously launched the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns (Perrault 1687, 3). That Deshoulières, like Perrault, fashions Louis as comparable to the glorious Roman emperor signals her modern sympathies in the quarrel. She expresses the same preference in *Ballade à M. Charpentier*, addressed to the author of two works that defended the French language as superior to Latin: *Défense de la langue française pour l'inscription de l'Arc de triomphe* (1676) [Defense of the French language for the inscription on the triumphal arch] and *Excellence de la langue française* (1683) [Excellence of the French language].[3] In our discussions of the quarrel, it is wise to keep in mind that "there are Ancient and Modern positions to be found in writings, but no pure and simple Ancients and Moderns among actual writers" as Larry F. Norman puts it (2011, 49). As we shall see further on, Deshoulières' position within the quarrel is not modern without certain reservations. That being said, Deshoulières' panegyrics on the king express sympathies towards a strong central power, and some poems give support to the revocation of the edict of Nantes (Deshoulières 2010, 238, 352). She praises the king's extensive warfare, but balances acclaim with the view that praiseworthy warfare aims at "une paix éternelle" [an eternal peace], as she notes in an epistle to the dauphin (Deshoulières 2010, 325).

Deshoulières' praise of the king follows a common trend for encomiums in the late seventeenth century. This is a tendency to represent the king as incomparable in his perfection not only to heroes from antiquity, but to every human being (see Schröder 2019, 110–111). Already from the 1670s, according to Mark Bannister (2001, 52), "the king was seen to be qualitatively different, not really a man like his subjects but the embodiment of all the higher aspirations of the nation." The deification of Louis accompanied a "loss of faith in the heroic potential of the ordinary mortal" (Bannister 2001, 38). When seen in this context, it becomes less of a contradiction that Deshoulières' oeuvre comprises both praise of heroism connected to absolutism and a philosophical critique of heroism, as long as the latter relates to the human condition more generally.

Moreover, if heroism expresses a striving towards immortality, Deshoulières shows caution with regard to how her own literary production could be perceived as an attempt to eternalize *her* name. In the preface to her collection of poems of

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3 See e.g., *Ballade à M. Charpentier* (Deshoulières 2010, 173).

1688 she writes that it is “Le grand nom de Louis mêlé dans mes ouvrages” [Louis’ great name blended into my works] rather than the poems as such, which “[l]es conduira sans doute à l’immortalité” [will undoubtedly transport them to immortality] (Deshoulières 2010, 99). By terming her poems “mes amusements” [my amusements], she reveals a writing ethic appropriate to an aristocratic author who did not write for fame or commercial gain, but, from within salon culture, for pleasure (Deshoulières 2010, 99). As we shall see, this attitude of human modesty, which simultaneously cherishes pleasure, characterizes well Deshoulières’ philosophical disposition, both overall and in relation to the pursuit of glory.

Reviving Ancient Philosophy in the Critique of Heroism

One stanza from the poem *Réflexions morales sur L’envie immodérée de faire Passer son Nom à la posterité* (1693) [Moral reflections on the immoderate desire to pass on one’s name to posterity], is worth quoting at length to introduce the topic of Deshoulières’ critique of heroism. The stanza displays a rather lenient philosophical attitude towards the pursuit of glory that is important to bear in mind before moving on to her harsher critique of heroism:

> Je sais que la gloire est trop belle
> Pour ne pas inspirer de violents désirs,
> chercher, l’acquérir, et pouvoir jouir d’elle
> Est le plus parfait des plaisirs.
> Oui, ce bonheur pour l’Homme est le bonheur suprême,
> Mais c’est là qu’il faut s’arrêter.
> Tout charmé qu’il en est, à quelque point qu’il l’aime,
> Il a peu de bon sens quand il va s’entêter
> De la vanité de porter
> Sa gloire au-delà de lui-même;
> Et quand toujours en proie à ce désir extrême
> Il perd le temps de la goûter.
> (Deshoulières 2010, 341)

> [I know that glory is too beautiful
> to not inspire violent desires.
> Searching, acquiring it, and to be able to enjoy it
> is the most perfect of pleasures.
> Yes, this happiness for Man is supreme happiness,
> but this is when he should stop himself.
> However charmed he is by it, to the point that he loves it,

> There is little common sense in him stubbornly persisting,
> out of vanity, to carry
> his glory further away than himself;
> and when he, always the prey of this extreme desire
> loses the time to savour it.]

The poem is a good indication that Deshoulières' modern inclinations are not necessarily contradictory to how she revives ideas from ancient philosophy, even if moderns have done better. This is what her late friend, François de La Rochefoucauld, had done in her view. In her ode to him, she notes that his wisdom "[p]asse celle dont la Grèce / Donna l'exemple aux Romains" [surpasses the one that Greece / gave as example to the Romans] (Deshoulières 2010, 247). When it comes to the ancients, Deshoulières notes with characteristic scepticism that no ancient "[n]'a pu percer la nuit sombre / Qui nous cache l'avenir" [has been able to penetrate the dark night / that hides the future from us] (Deshoulières 2010, 246).

In spite of the ancients' limited perspective, the poet sometimes passes on lessons from Seneca, but her more pragmatic acceptance of the passions that drive humans to seek, for instance, glory signals how in her poetry she also revives the Epicureanism she had become familiar with thanks to her teacher, the Gassendi-inspired, libertine poet Jean Dehénault. The verses above are in line with the sarcasm she directs against the strict Stoic condemnation of emotions in an epistle of 1688: "les moindres émotions / Sont des crimes pour un Stoïque" [the slightest emotions / are crimes for the Stoic] (Deshoulières 2010, 227). It is vain and illusory to believe that it is possible to renounce the passions. Upholding the Epicurean philosophical tenet that the goal of pleasure represents the highest good, Deshoulières encourages embracing the pleasure derived from winning glory, as in the stanza quoted above.

But, not unlike in the Epicurean tradition, Deshoulières expresses some concerns about pleasure, too. She cautions against taking glory to such an extreme that it becomes vanity. The desire for glory loses its charm if taken beyond the sphere of one's own material existence. The stanza above does not go into more detail about the Epicurean ideal of pleasure, to which Deshoulières however alludes elsewhere as "[m]es tranquilles plaisirs" [my tranquil pleasures], a description which seems difficult to reconcile with a strong passion for heroism (Deshoulières 2010, 102). For Epicurus, pursuing the highest pleasure is not an encouragement to hedonism, but to "the pleasure of rest" or "the passive pleasure associated with the absence of anxiety and physical pain, equivalent to tranquility (*ataraxia*) in the soul" (Sarasohn 1996, 53). That Deshoulières restates the idea that pain is the greatest evil in human life is clear from another stanza in the poem to La Rochefoucauld:

Je ris de ce fier Stoïque,
Qui dans les tourments se pique
D'avoir un visage égal,
Qui tandis qu'il en soupire,
A l'audace de nous dire,
La douleur n'est point un mal.
(Deshoulières 2010, 242)

[I laugh at this proud Stoic
who in torments prides himself
on keeping a straight face,
who, as he sighs over it,
has the audacity to say to us
that pain is no evil at all.]

The body's reactions to pain betray the person who dares asserting, in words, that pain is no evil. In fact, it would not matter if the cause of pain were physical or psychological in nature. Invisible connections unite the soul with the body, which is mechanically understood as a machine even if "l'âme soit divine" [the soul is divine] (Deshoulières 2010, 242). As Conley comments, "[d]espite the pious bow to the 'divinity' of the soul, the ode clearly designates body-soul activity as a single response to material causation" (Conley 2002, 66). The importance of retaining a linkage to the material foundation of life is something that both Stoic control of the passions and heroic striving neglect.

Réflexions diverses of 1688 expresses suspicion about the heroism of voluntary death among ancients such as Socrates, Cato and Seneca. Even if Deshoulières draws on ancient philosophy, late seventeenth-century disillusion about the human potential for heroism nevertheless resonates in her critique of heroes from antiquity. She questions the courage of

Ces Grecs et ces Romains dont la mort volontaire
A rendu les noms si fameux.
Qu'ont-ils fait de si grand? Ils sortaient de la vie
Lors que de disgrâces suivie
Elle n'avait plus rien d'agréable pour eux.
Par une seule mort ils s'en épargnaient mille;
Qu'elle est douce à des cœurs lassés de soupirer!
(Deshoulières 2010, 194)

[These Greeks and Romans whose voluntary death
have made their names so famous.
What greatness have they achieved? They left life
when it, accompanied by disgrace,
had nothing more that was agreeable to them.

> With one sole death they spared themselves from a thousand;
> how death is sweet for hearts that are tired of sighing!]

Rather than arguing against suicide from the Christian position that it is a sin, Deshoulières' examples of ostensible heroic suicides reveal that in comparison to a life in disgrace, death must have appeared as a more agreeable option than life for the ancients in question. That life in the quotation offers nothing agreeable, whereas death, by contrast, becomes attractive shows that pleasure is the chief principle for humans, even when pleasure is associated with death.

The Eternal Material Workings of the Universe

The above example suggests that heroism is a questionable guiding principle for life. In *Réflexions morales sur L'envie immodérée de faire Passer son Nom à la postérité*, Deshoulières points out how this desire does not guarantee the virtues to which people might otherwise relate it. Instead, "[l]es grands crimes immortalisent / Autant que les grandes vertus" [[b]ig crimes make immortal / Just like grand virtues] (Deshoulières 2010, 341). Rather than trying to escape death through heroic quests, one ought to reckon with death philosophically. Along with Seneca, Deshoulières explains that man "commence à mourir longtemps avant qu'il meure" [starts to die a long time before he dies] (Deshoulières 2010, 190). Death is not a final event to end human life, but an imperceptible process that starts long before death ultimately takes place. The ingrained temporariness of human life forms part of Deshoulières' Epicurean conception of how the universe is composed of matter in perpetual motion, as illustrated in her ode to La Rochefoucauld:

> Que le corps se décompose,
> Qu'il se fait de chaque chose
> Des arrangements divers;
> Et que toujours la matière
> Infinie, active, entière
> Circule dans l'univers.
> (Deshoulières 2010, 246)

> [That bodies disintegrate by themselves,
> that they are made up of everything
> in different arrangements,
> and that matter always
> circulates in the universe
> infinite, active, unchanged.]

The stanza reiterates the atomism of Epicureanism: atoms moving by their own force combine to form bodies that then disintegrate for the atoms to combine in new combinations. Importantly, even without a divinity there is eternity in materialism because atoms in motion, unlike everything else, are infinite. In this context, Lacey Giles notes, “it is indeed an attachment to the idea of the infinite whence comes most pain and suffering” (Giles 2021, 70). Therefore, the heroic pursuit of immortality and glory makes humans lose sight of the best that human life offers. Through such pursuits, humans lose touch with the precious moment of the now:

> Pour obtenir qu’un jour notre nom y parvienne,
> Et pour nous l’assurer durable et glorieux,
> Nous perdons le présent, ce temps si précieux,
> Le seul bien qui nous appartienne,
> Et qui tel qu’un éclair disparaît à nos yeux.
> [. . .]
> Victimes de leur vanité,
> Il n’est chagrin, travail, danger, adversité,
> À quoi les mortels ne s’exposent
> Pour transmettre leurs noms à la postérité!
> (Deshoulières 2010, 340)
>
> [In order to achieve that one day our name will succeed
> and to assure us that is it durable and glorious,
> we lose the present, the very precious time,
> which is the only good that belongs to us,
> and which like a lightning bolt disappears from sight.
> [. . .]
> Victims of their vanity
> there is no sorrow, threat or adversity,
> that mortals do not expose themselves to
> in order to pass on their name to posterity!]

The quotation reformulates two verses from the stanza in the same poem that condone the pleasure derived from winning glory, but which warn against going beyond the limits of this pleasure by taking it to extremes: “Et quand toujours en proie à ce désir extrême / Il perd le temps de la goûter” [And when he – always the prey of this extreme desire – / loses the time to savor it] (Deshoulières 2010, 341). Deluded by the permanence of glory, humans are willing to put themselves through immense suffering. Thereby, they neglect savouring the fleeting moments of pleasure in the present, which are the true good things in life.

When going to extremes in one’s pursuit of an eternal name, one risks disconnecting oneself from the material foundation of existence. The same is true if the individual pursues heroic deeds at the expense of love. Deshoulières’ poems sometimes stage a conflict between love and glory by making a female voice lament how

a male hero for instance “préfère au plaisir d’être aimé tendrement, / Les périls où conduit cette gloire cruelle” [prefers over the pleasure of being loved tenderly / the perils that this cruel glory leads to] (Deshoulières 2010, 279). In doing so, heroism risks disconnecting the individual not just from his lover, but also from the very soul of the universe. As the title of Deshoulières’ poem *Imitation de Lucrèce* suggests, it rephrases how Lucretius communicates Epicurus’ philosophy in the poetic form of *De rerum natura*. That love makes up the very soul of the universe is implicit in how the two poems start with a tribute to the goddess Venus. Interestingly, the love that Deshoulières venerates in her poetry does not look back only to antiquity and its Epicureanism. Her ideal for lovers consists in what she terms “[a]mour antique / Dont triste mort seule voyait le bout” [[o]ld-fashioned love / of which only death saw the end] (Deshoulières 2010, 143). That is, a love that lasts for life, and which Deshoulières nostalgically, like the pastoral novels from earlier in the century, associates with the time of chivalry and its courtly love practices.

Impairing Models from Antiquity in Genséric

I am now turning to Deshoulières’ tragedy *Genséric* (1680) which precedes many of the poems I have cited. *Genséric* premiered and was staged around twenty times at l’Hôtel de Bourgogne. Deshoulières also published the play the same year anonymously as Madame****. The French original has recently been republished and an English translation by Perry Gethner appeared in print in 2015 (Deshoulières 2015b). Criticism of the play, however, largely remains disconnected from treatment of Deshoulières’ poetry. I wish to show that the play offers new perspectives on Deshoulières’ treatment of heroism and on how heroism relates to history in her oeuvre.

Genséric premiered when the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns was brewing, and in which Deshoulières, as noted, gave support to the modern cause. The quarrel is a key reference point for understanding shifts in conceptions of historical time in late seventeenth-century France, as the tragedy makes perceptible. Whereas the ancient point of view held that sources from classical antiquity prescribed universal and timeless standards for language and art, the modern position defended the view that art from the modern era could surpass ancient models. Before giving audiences a play to debate, Deshoulières had already been involved in controversies about the great genre of French neoclassical tragedy. She was an admirer of Corneille and had sided against Racine in 1677 in a cabal that led to a collectively produced burlesque sonnet against his *Phèdre*. After her *Genséric*, Racine reportedly retorted by commenting on the play as “une méchante pièce” [a

terrible piece] (Deshoulières 2010, 479). Regarding Deshoulières' handling of the neoclassical legacy in the tragedy itself, editor and translator Perry Gethner suggests that she "deliberately sabotaged the consecrated models of Corneille and Racine, intending instead to propose a brand new vision of the tragic genre" (Gethner 2015, 172). In terms of form, *Genséric* observes alexandrine meter and a five act structure. The play loosely adheres to the Aristotelian unities as reactualized by neoclassical drama. When it comes to its standard models of heroism, however, they "no longer operate" in the tragedy, as Gethner notes (2015, 169).

The subject matter of *Genséric* abstains from idealizing antiquity. Rather than depicting its greatness, the play stages its decline. The action of the tragedy takes place in Carthage at Genséric's court. Historically, he was the most powerful king of the Vandals. Not only did he raid large parts of North Africa and the Mediterranean islands, but in the year 455 he sacked Rome itself, bringing back with him the empress of Rome, Eudoxe, and her daughters as captives. In staging this moment in history, Deshoulières is working within the framework of a Petrarchan division between the ancient and the modern world: the Middle Ages are introduced as a dark interim period that started with the decline of Rome (Norman 2011, 35).

Genséric indeed fractures idealized versions of the Roman world and the heroism with which it was associated. The collapse of ideals becomes clearer in comparison to the three main sources for the storyline: the Byzantine historian from the sixth century, Procopius' *History of the Wars*, book III; the pastoral novel *L'Astrée*; and Georges de Scudéry's tragicomedy *Eudoxe* of 1639–1640, which scholars often ignore as a source. The relevant narrative in *L'Astrée* is "Suite de l'histoire d'Eudoxe, d'Ursace et d'Olimbre" [The sequel of the history of Eudoxe, of Ursaces, and of Olimbres] from part 5 (1628), which Balthazar Baro produced after the author Honoré d'Urfé's death, and which *Eudoxe* and *Genséric* each rework. According to Procopius, Genséric plundered Rome at the behest of Eudoxe as vengeance for the Emperor Maximus' crimes against her and her family. As already mentioned, Genséric's desire for looting did not stop at accomplishing Eudoxe's will, as he took her and her daughters captive. This is the backstory for all three seventeenth-century adaptations. They all start the action upon Genséric's return from Rome to Carthage, but from this point, they depart from Procopius. *L'Astrée* invents an extra son for Genséric, the heir to the throne Thrasimund, who also features in the plays. In all three modern productions, he is the love interest of one of Eudoxe's daughters. In *L'Astrée* and *Eudoxe*, two knights from Rome go on a quest to liberate the captured women, and it is unrequited love for the empress that motivates Genséric's misdeeds. Whereas Genséric in Procopius simply continues to plunder the Mediterranean territories, here he repents of his crimes after wrongly believing that the empress has died in a fire. He sets the captives free and lets Eudoxe and her daughters marry the men they love.

Shattered Expectations of Heroism after Rome's Decline

In Deshoulières' tragedy, audiences witness something quite different from how *L'Astrée* and *Eudoxe* soften the shift from classical Rome to the rule of a Vandal king by having Roman heroism turn into chivalry and by investing romantic interest and virtue onto the Empress Eudoxe and the ruler of the Vandals. *Genséric* starts by playing on the hope of a heroic rescue of the empress and her daughter. The latter has no siblings in this adaptation, and the daughter's name is Eudoxe, like her mother. I shall ignore how the identical names occasion a ploy of mistaken identities and simply distinguish between the two by referring to the mother as the empress and to the daughter as Eudoxe. The latter notes:

> Au bruit que font nos fers, il n'est point de héros
> Qui puisse s'endormir dans un honteux repos;
> Pleine de cet espoir, je vois leurs armes prêtes . . .
> (Deshoulières 2015a, 527)

> There is no hero who, on learning we are captives,
> Could sit idly by in a disgraceful slumber;
> Filled with that hope, I see their arms made ready . . .
> (Deshoulières 2015b, 179)

Audiences familiar with *L'Astrée* and *Eudoxe* would expect two Roman heroes to show up at Genséric's court, as Eudoxe does. But Deshoulières' Eudoxe faces disappointment in this regard. When she recognizes that no heroes are arriving, she exclaims: "Quoi! de tant de pays alliés de l'Empire, / Pas un n'armera-t-il pour nous tirer des mains . . ." (What! From all the countries allied to the empire, / Not one will take arms to deliver us . . .) (Deshoulières 2015a, 551; 2015b, 201).

Whereas the hope is shattered that heroism and alliance with Rome are effective globally, Deshoulières boosts Thrasimund's heroic qualities and potential. He features as "ce jeune héros" (that young hero) and a noble person with "[u]n mérite, un esprit, dont rien ne se défend, / Une âme grande et belle, une valeur insigne" ([h]is merit, his mind, against which there's no defense, / A great and noble soul, an illustrious valor) (Deshoulières 2015a, 565; 2015b, 212). The heroism he comes to represent is humanitarian in kind. In contrast to how other Vandals ravaged Rome, Thrasimund is intent on stopping their "insolente fureur, / Et touché du destin de cette auguste ville, / À son peuple innocent accorder un asile" (insolent fury [. . .] / And, touched by the fate of the majestic city, / Granting asylum to its innocent people) (Deshoulières 2015a, 529; 2015b, 181). Thrasimund's civility and susceptibility to pity make him appear like a hero with virtue and a heart.

Thrasimund's heart belongs to Eudoxe. Even if audiences were already expecting a love story between the two characters, Deshoulières still turns it into something unexpected that Thrasimund is able to love. Being susceptible to love is a trait that in this play makes Thrasimund very dissimilar to his father and his younger brother, Hunéric. Thrasimund refutes the expectation – even his own – that the milieu he was born into would have prevented him from loving Eudoxe. He notes:

> Je fuyais de l'amour les trompeuses amorces:
> Mais est-il quelque chose au-dessus de ses forces?
> Je crus, plein de la gloire où mon cœur aspirait,
> Qu'au milieu des dangers ce cœur s'endurcirait:
> Né parmi les soldats, nourri dans les alarmes,
> En ai-je moins appris à répandre des larmes?
> (Deshoulières 2015a, 533)

> I was fleeing Cupid's treacherous allure.
> But is there anything beyond his power?
> I believed that this heart, aspiring just to glory,
> Would become hardened in the midst of dangers.
> Born among soldiers, brought up amid combats,
> Have I been spared from learning to shed tears?
> (Deshoulières 2015b, 185)

Love is too strong a force for Thrasimund to fend off even if one would expect him to be immune to it given the military life and unrestful times of war he was born into. What he had always striven for was the type of pursuit of glory that Deshoulières criticizes in her poems and which she sometimes chastises for neglecting love. The love between Thrasimund and Eudoxe connects them to the inner workings of the material universe and brings hope of a reconciliation between heroism and love.

Genséric is not a pastoral novel or a tragicomedy. As a tragedy, the play traps Thrasimund in an impossible conflict between his love for Eudoxe and his familial bond with Genséric. Before the conflict escalates to the point where Thrasimund has to make a choice, he attempts to solve it by using his closeness to Genséric to try to negotiate the liberation of the two captives. But when Genséric turns out to be impervious to persuasion, Thrasimund's ties to his father emerge as a tragic conflict that, unlike in *Eudoxe*, undercuts heroism. Against the wishes of Eudoxe, Thrasimund's love starts to impel him toward violence, incited by the empress's unrestrained urge to take vengeance on Genséric by provoking internal strife in the Vandal monarchy. Due to this fault, Thrasimund does not live up to "the heroic ideal in Corneille, for whom love is converted into a virtue" to quote

Gethner (2015, 169). Instead, Deshoulières' play produces a new conclusion to the debacle of heroism that Corneille had staged in his last tragedies, especially *Suréna* (1674).[4] Thrasimund ultimately sees no other solution than to commit fratricide and escape from Carthage with the captives. This plan is a reaction to the fact that Genséric, in a plot twist, has decided to marry Eudoxe to Hunéric, who is his favourite son, and thereby expand the Vandal's power to Rome. Whereas *Eudoxe* ends the conflict between Thrasimund and Genséric before any bloodshed occurs by retaining *L'Astrée*'s plot device of the fire, Deshoulières leaves it to human characters to bring the plot to conclusion. Instead of killing Hunéric, Thrasimund only wounds him, but Genséric nevertheless sentences Thrasimund to death. This turn of events leads the people of Carthage to rebel against Genséric in support of Thrasimund. But, although Thrasimund repents and subjects himself to Genséric, believing his father will then permit him to marry Eudoxe, he is mistaken. Thrasimund thus disappoints the people's hope that he will immediately take the throne and relieve them of Genséric's rule. The ending extinguishes any possibility of realizing Thrasimund's potential to humanize heroism. Far from it: in the final debacle, another character, Sophronie, kills him in an act of vengeance over her unrequited love for him. Instead of saving heroism by coupling it with love, heroism and love collapse when vengeful and extreme passions collide in the ending.

Restoring the Glory of Rome?

The hopes that die with Thrasimund include the hope that he could restore Rome to glory after his father had desecrated it. Even if the empress's hatred for Genséric extends to his sons, she nevertheless professes her esteem for Thrasimund (Deshoulières 2015a, 553–554; 2015b, 202–203). At a plot turn where the empress plans to escape Carthage and make Thrasimund marry into the Roman bloodline by taking Eudoxe as his wife, she tries to win support to the cause from Sophronie (who is of Roman descent too and who she wrongly thinks is an ally) by envisioning Thrasimund as the saviour of Roman glory:

> Ce qu'il a fait pour nous à Rome et dans ces lieux
> Doit paraître aux Romains digne de mes aïeux,

4 For an overview of the topic of the debacle of heroism in Corneille, including seminal works such as Paul Benichou's *Morales du grand siècle* (1948) and Serge Doubrovsky's *Corneille et la dialectique du héros* (1963), see Lyons 2007.

> Et si je lui pouvais donner, avec ma fille,
> L'Empire que le sort ôte à notre famille,
> Je croirais rétablir la gloire des Romains
> En le faisant tomber en de si bonnes mains.
> Le Ciel puisse si bien seconder son courage,
> Que nous puissions bientôt abandonner Carthage!
> (Deshoulières 2015a, 577)

> What he has done for us in Rome and here
> Should seem to the Romans worthy of my forebears;
> And if I could give him, with my daughter's hand,
> The empire that fate snatched from my family,
> I'd think I was restoring Rome's old glory
> By making it fall into such good hands.
> May heaven favor his courageous efforts
> So well that we can soon abandon Carthage!
> (Deshoulières 2015b, 222)

In as much as Thrasimund's qualities rather than his ethnicity define his identity, he is more a Roman than a Vandal. But when the hopes invested in Thrasimund are crushed, hope for the future of the Roman dynasty is similarly shattered. At that point, Eudoxe has in fact already disavowed the legacy of the Roman imperial bloodline. For instance, she laments: "Tant et tant de Césars que pour aïeux je compte / Ne servent aujourd'hui qu'à redoubler ma honte" (The fact that I count among my ancestors / So many Caesars only adds to my shame today) (Deshoulières 2015a, 559; 2015b, 207). The Roman nobility is a source of shame to the virtuous, but increasingly powerless Eudoxe. In this tragedy, it does not take a Vandal king for Rome to crumble. As the empress reveals, corrupted mores, rather than Genséric's plundering, brought about the fall of the Roman empire:

> Rome que nous voyons n'est que l'ombre de Rome:
> Les Romains d'aujourd'hui, cent et cent fois vaincus,
> N'ont que de lâches cœurs, que des cœurs corrompus.
> Il n'est plus de grandeur, plus de vertu romaine.
> [. . .]
> Oui, ce feu qui brûla tes temples, tes palais,
> Genséric l'alluma bien moins que tes forfaits.
> (Deshoulières 2015a, 551–552)

> The Rome we see is but a shadow of Rome;
> The Romans of today, countless times defeated,
> Have only cowardly and corrupted hearts.
> There is no more Roman greatness or Roman virtue.
> [. . .]
> Yes, that fire that burned your palaces, your temples,

> Was lit by your crimes, far more than by Genseric.
> (Deshoulières 2015b, 201, 202)

By locating the primary cause for the decline of Rome in the moral decay of the Romans themselves, Deshoulières nullifies any dignified end to Rome's greatness. Thereby, the play confirms the instability of human life and civilizations in a pessimistic recognition of the intrinsic decline within them. Even if Deshoulières in her panegyrics elevates Louis XIV to the rank of Augustus, *Genséric* testifies to an awareness that even greatness disintegrates, an awareness also expressed in some of the poems where she laments the corruption of her own age.[5]

Kingship After Heroism

What kind of authority does a post-heroic world invite, for Deshoulières? *Genséric* demonstrates one post-heroic path, which is not commendable in great part due to the nature of Genséric's rule. One indication that the play, like her poetry, is concerned with political issues beyond the conflict of the *Fronde* is that it enacts a conflict within the royal order of succession rather than staging a conflict between heroic nobility and an absolutist king, as in *Suréna* for instance. Thrasimund's conflict with his father embodies a conflict between unrealized heroic and non-heroic kingship. Thrasimund has the potential, but never succeeds in embodying the heroic image of absolutist kingship that Deshoulières depicts in her panegyrics. Moreover, because *Genséric*, in comparison to the pre-*Fronde* play *Eudoxe*, displaces Thrasimund's violent answer to the conflict from parricide to fratricide, the play suppresses the topic of regicide or tyrannicide.

Instead of presenting a positive exit from heroism, *Genséric* sets up an anti-ideal for a monarchic ruler. Besides applying the term *tyran* (and derivations) to Genséric, the play labels him a *barbarian* (Deshoulières 2015a, 526, 548, 555, 576, 578, 580, 585, 589; Deshoulières 2015b, 179, 199, 203, 222, 229, 233, 224, 225). Understood as the other in Greco-Roman culture, in Furetière's dictionary of 1690, a barbarian is described as an "[e]stranger qui est d'un pays fort éloigné, sauvage, mal poli, cruel, & qui a des mœurs forts différentes des nôtres" [foreigner from far-

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5 One of Deshoulières' untitled poems for instance states that the present is a time when virtue has been banished: "Ce siècle est corrompue, je n'y vois que faiblesses, / Je n'y vois qu'infidélité" [This century is corrupt, in it I see only weakness, / I see only faithlessness] and "[c]e n'est plus la vertu qui règne dans les cœurs, / L'usage en est perdu, ce siècle l'a bannie" [It is no longer virtue that reigns in hearts / The custom is lost, this century has banished it] (Deshoulières 2010, 419, 420, see also 134–135).

away countries, a cruel uncivilized savage with very different morals than ours] (Furetière, 1690). The characterization of Genséric as a barbarian is probably a more negatively loaded term than the label "Vandal," since Vandals were not singled out as the group that emblematized barbarian destruction until the aftermath of the French Revolution (Merrills and Miles 2010, 7–11). As a representative of the recognizable, but not yet completely negatively stereotyped group of the Vandals, Genséric embodies the new power that has arisen from, and due to, the ruin of Rome.

Genséric represents kingship without divine substantiation after heroism.[6] His empire is a wealthy bellicose regime built on plundering. He describes the military and moral weakness of other reigns that his rule has benefitted from:

> Nous pouvons tout oser dans l'état où nous sommes:
> Nous avons des vaisseaux, de l'argent et des hommes.
> Les princes nos voisins, par la guerre affaiblis,
> Dans un lâche repos semblent ensevelis;
> (Deshoulières 2015a, 542)

> In our position we can dare anything;
> We have plenty of ships, of money and of men.
> Our neighboring kings, weakened by years of war,
> Seem to be buried in cowardly idleness.
> (Deshoulières 2015b, 193)

Believing he has become the new master of the world, Genséric further notes: "tant de longs travaux, [. . .] tant de grands exploits / [. . .] m'ont mis au-dessus de tous les autres rois" ([s]o many long campaigns and glorious exploits / [. . .] have raised me above all other kings) (Deshoulières 2015a, 561; 2015b, 209). In ambition, Genséric has gone beyond Deshoulières' critique of heroism. He lacks essential noble, heroic values. For instance, he is an oath breaker, indifferent to justice, glory and the rights of other sovereigns as is clear from a quote in which Thrasimund recounts his own failed attempts at persuading Genséric to release the captives:

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6 According to the empress, Genséric is the proof that divine justice does not exist. She tells him: "Ne crains point par le Ciel d'être réduit en poudre; / Puisque tu vis encor, le Ciel n'a point de foudre" (Don't fear that Heaven will smash you into dust; / Since you still live, Heaven has no thunderbolt) (Deshoulières 2015a, 589; 2015b, 233).

> En vain j'ai fait parler la gloire, la justice,
> Le respect des serments [. . .],
> Les droits des souverains [. . .]
> (Deshoulières 2015a, 527)

> In vain did I invoke glory and justice,
> The respect for oaths [. . .]
> [. . .] rights as [. . .] fellow sovereign
> (Deshoulières 2015b, 180)

This type of post-heroic ruler rejects striving for glory, ostensibly for the good of the state, but in reality, to advance his unbridled will. Genséric for instance describes the political leadership he finds best in the following terms: "Un sage potentat / Doit immoler sa gloire au bien de son État" (A wise potentate / Must sacrifice his fame to his state's welfare) (Deshoulières 2015a, 559–560; 2015b, 208). For Genséric, the welfare of the state is in fact synonymous with his own unrestrained will. What stands in place of the pursuit of glory is an art of governance wholly dictated by *raison d'état*.[7]

I have already noted that, as regards aristocratic heroism, *Genséric* has moved beyond the conflict of the *Fronde*, but the play still has some of the same concerns about a strong central power that had troubled the *frondeurs* (see Bannister 2001, 48). The Machiavellian aspects of *raison d'état* were a cause for concern for them as for Deshoulières.[8] For Machiavelli, the subordination of morals, precepts and past examples to a bendable state logic aiming at securing the power of the state, stems from a recognition of the constant instability of the world, which is also evident in Deshoulières' oeuvre (see Machiavelli 1992; Jouanna 2014, 79). As a ruler whose domination has arisen from instability, Genséric shuns no means to achieve his ends. Thus, if he experiences setbacks, his strategy is to turn them to his advantage in order to get his way regardless of what cruelties this entails. I have already mentioned that he uses Thrasimund's failed attack on Hunéric as the occasion to sentence the former to death and thereby make his younger son heir to the throne. Thus, Genséric notes to Thrasimund: "Je sais qu'il est cruel, mais quoi qu'il en puisse être / Dans mes États, enfin, je veux être le maître" (I know it's cruel, but

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7 The term *raison d'État* is used in the play to describe Hunéric's deceptive conduct (Deshoulières 2015a, 537; 2015b, 189).

8 The untitled poem from manuscript 3311 states that among elites, injustices have become *raison d'état*: "Selon le rang qu'on tient le crime se mesure, / Il change chez les grands de nom et de nature, / L'injustice chez eux n'est que raison d'état, / Les crimes sont permis en bonne politique" [Crime is measured according to rank, / in high circles it changes name and nature. / For them injustices is nothing but raison d'état. / Crimes are permitted in their fine politics] (Deshoulières 2010, 420).

however it is judged, / I insist, in short, on being master of my realm) (Deshoulières 2015a, 585; 2015b, 229). Or, simply: “Songez que je peux tout” (Remember, I’m all-powerful) (Deshoulières 2015a, 580; 2015b, 225).

In reality, however, Genséric’s power is not total, as his control over hearts is wanting, and as it turns out that the submissiveness of his subjects relies on the keeping of alliances. That being said, his power grows from states of exception. For instance, he practically welcomes the rebellion in support of Thrasimund that breaks out against him in the last act:

> Je permets aux mutins de me faire la guerre:
> Alors je serai maître, alors je choisirai
> Pour le bien de l’État quel sang je répandrai.
> (Deshoulières 2015a, 588)

> I’ll permit the rebels to make war against me.
> Then I’ll be master; then I’ll choose which blood
> I’ll spill for the welfare of the state.
> (Deshoulières 2015b, 231)

Genséric wills the rebellion as an occasion to reestablish his rule. Eruptions of violence function as the foundation for his power; they make him master. A clash with rebels would be the moment when he alone could redefine, at will, who are the members and enemies of his state. Rather than portraying a tyrant with omnipotence, *Genséric* depicts a ruler who strives to become one. In doing so, the play abandons ideals about eternal models of governance and shows instead the linkage between political instability and a rapacious execution of *raison d’état*. With such a premise, to be master of geographical space becomes a matter of being able to seize the opportunities that times of unpredictable change produce.

With temporal changes gaining importance in governance, what exit does the tragedy provide? Playing on the audience’s expectations at a fast pace, the ending of the play confronts Genséric with the terrifying event of Thrasimund’s unexpected death. The news about it finally arouses Genséric’s fatherly love and repentance: “La nature s’explique; et surpris et troublé, / D’inutiles remords je me trouve accablé” (Nature asserts itself; surprised and troubled, / I’m overwhelmed now with useless remorse) (Deshoulières 2015a, 590; 2015b, 233). But Genséric’s regrets are short-lived as he quickly seizes the moment in order to profit from Sophronie’s murder of Thrasimund: “Songeons à profiter du crime” (Let us think how we might profit from her misdeed) (Deshoulières 2015a, 590; 2015b, 233), as he notes to Hunéric. Audiences however remain in suspense, which the play abstains from resolving, with regard to Genséric’s final triumph. If the tragedy abandons the neoclassical prescription that a play should end with the triumph

of virtue, it does not leave Genséric on solid ground either. In the end, events threaten to move too quickly for him as he rushes to prevent Eudoxe from committing suicide when the last scene closes. If she acts faster than he does, his plan of seizing the imperial Roman throne by marrying her to Hunéric and once again plundering Rome, will fail. Whereas the couple does marry according to Procopius, Deshoulières' inconclusive, mid-air ending captures better the instability of time itself.

But in looking for exits, we find that *Genséric* might provide another one, not dictated by the temporal sequence from beginning to end. Earlier in the play, Eudoxe has uttered some noteworthy lines to suggest another type of exit from Genséric's domain of power:

> Hé! Que m'importe à moi que devienne l'Empire?
> Le repos est, Seigneur, le seul bien où j'aspire:
> Laissez-le-moi goûter [. . .]
> (Deshoulières 2015a, 558–559)

> Why, what do I care what happens to the empire?
> The only goal I aspire to is a calm life;
> Let me enjoy that [. . .]
> (Deshoulières 2015b, 207)

In this way, Eudoxe points in an Epicurean fashion in the direction of an alternative to Genséric's post-heroism. This is an alternative that Deshoulières envisions in her idyllic poetry through an Epicurean/Arcadian natural setting.

Conclusion: Back to Nature

When making natural settings the locus of a more peaceful way of living in her poetry, Deshoulières challenges the optimism that characterized the modern party in the quarrel with the ancients. To conclude this chapter and to nuance the view of Deshoulières as supporting the modern party, she does for instance not share with the typical modern position a reliance on human reason as the means to ensure progress (see e.g., Deshoulières 2010, 124). Instead, she remains sceptical about the rationalistic reformulations of human superiority of her time by underlining that man ignores his own inability to master himself and therefore fails to adopt a more humble position (see e.g. Deshoulières 2010, 217).

Such a humble position would guide humans towards the ways of nature and away from their will to dominate and the pursuit of glory. Animals, and also savage man of a pristine golden age, lack these drives (Deshoulières 2010, 124, 243).

When comparing so-called civilized humans to animals, Deshoulières argues that the latter are wrongly accused of being barbarous, as she posits in the poem *La Solitude* where she describes the "dur siècle où nous sommes" [tough era we live in] (Deshoulières 2010, 263):

> De quel droit, de quel front, est-ce que l'on compare
> Ceux à qui la Nature a fait un cœur barbare,
> Aux Ours, aux Sanglier, aux Loups?
> Ils sont moins barbares que nous.
> (Deshoulières 2010, 262)
>
> [By what right, with what nerve, is it that we compare
> Those for whom nature has created a barbarous heart
> With bears, with boars, with wolves?
> They are less barbarous than we.]

Here, Deshoulières is obviously not using the term *barbare* to refer to a group of people, but to someone who acts cruelly. The point is that barbarians are not rivals to modern man. Instead, modern man, like Genséric, is barbarous while animals are not. Humans do far more harm than animals not least because the latter remain connected to love, the first law of nature (Deshoulières 2010, 188, 261). Cruelties like Genséric's are nonexistent among animals: "Nul n'exerce sur l'autre un pouvoir tyrannique, / [. . .] / Ce n'est que par les nœuds de l'amour qu'ils sont joints" [No one exercises tyrannical power over others / [. . .] / They are only tied together through love] (Deshoulières 2010, 261). When following nature alone, like animals do, "[t]ous les biens sont communs, tous les rangs sont égaux" [all goods are shared, all ranks are equal] (Deshoulières 2010, 261). Natural governance and authority, then, is what the king bee in a beehive executes. Loving his subjects, he is only king in order to "les conduire, / Et que pour leur faire du bien" [to lead them and to do good for them] (Deshoulières 2010, 262). Accordingly, it would be wrong to liken Genséric's barbaric rule to an original, "primitive" type of governance. Genséric's rule is just as different from nature's ways as is a corrupted regime.

It is in nature, and not in history, that Deshoulières finds enduring authority: "Dans ces lieux écartés que la Nature est belle! / Rien ne la défigure; Elle y garde toujours / La même autorité" [How nature is beautiful in these distant places. Nothing disfigures it. It always retains the same authority] (Deshoulières 2010, 260). Although Deshoulières' poetry about nature draws on known imagery of, for example, Arcadia, it nevertheless exemplifies how in the early modern period the contours of alternative ways to envision the past were in the making as a site for cultural self-critique. As Norman notes with regard to the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns, "both parties elaborated surprisingly complex period-

isations of antiquity (which included new notions of the pre-classical and primitive) and thereby exploded idealized visions of a cohesive Greco-Roman world" (Norman 2011, 6). Deshoulières' veneration for untamed nature, combined with her scepticism about reason and progress, places her in an unusual position in the quarrel between ancients and moderns. Especially her depiction of savage man, who lived peacefully "[s]ans bien, sans rang, sans envie" [without any goods, without social rank, without want] (Deshoulières 2010, 243), points towards Rousseau's state of nature and towards environmental urgencies today. Deshoulières' human rival to the barbarian, to Greco-Roman and to modern man, is a savage who inhabits the untamed nature of her poetry.

Nature in Deshoulières' poetry exists in another temporal dimension than civilization. The natural world exists in the eternal circuit of the changing seasons, unlike the temporariness of life in civilization (Deshoulières 2010, 171). Unlike for modern man, time must have seemed like an eternal, this-worldly present for the savage whose life appeared unaffected by time: "Comme il entrait à la vie / Il entrait dans le tombeau" [Like he entered life he entered the tomb] (Deshoulières 2010, 243). With her reservations about ancients and moderns alike, Deshoulières encourages recognition of the living eternities that persist in nature.

In this chapter, I have been tracing different senses of temporality in Deshoulières' work in order to nuance the understanding of her treatment of heroism between ancient and modern positions, between veneration for the permanence of ancient cultural models and acknowledgement of their disintegration through temporality. Including her encomiastic poetry, its context, and *Genséric* in the discussion substantiates her position as a supporter of the modern cause, but also deepens her critique of modernity and its sense of time. It is for this reason that she envisions naturally eternal models in nature, in a refashioning of Epicureanism and its virtues for a post-heroic age.

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Sofia Warkander

Disguised Body, Two-Faced Text: Storytelling as a Game of Power in Villedieu's *Mémoires de la vie de Henriette-Sylvie de Molière*

In Madame de Villedieu's epistolary novel *Mémoires de la vie de Henriette-Sylvie de Molière* (1672–1674), the eponymous heroine leads a life full of disguises and riddles of identity. In one memorable scene, she is discovered in the arms of another woman. Having first seduced the woman while dressed as a man, she must then convince the woman's husband that she is, in fact, a woman to escape his wrath. On seeing her beautiful body revealed, he in turn is seduced by it. While Sylvie as a man moved him to murderous rage, Sylvie as a woman turns him into a humble admirer. In this scene as throughout the entire novel, Sylvie's body is the site of multiple and competing desires, fantasies and beliefs. It gives rise to adoration and control, where one often gives way to the other and vice versa, as desire is joined with attempts to control and imprison this body.

Those around her are scandalized by the desire Sylvie inspires, as well as by her seemingly transgressive actions; and the *Mémoires* see her frequently confined by external powers. Her body is at the centre of negotiations of power, specifically of a woman's power or influence over herself. It is something that others seek to control, but it is also a source of irreverent agency and childish playfulness, not to mention sensual pleasure. In her dual role as agent and object of desire, Sylvie moves through the limitations and possibilities opened up by the desire awakened by, and in, her body (Assaf 2001, 521–522). Sylvie's bodily strategies to escape her imprisonment take the form of the aforementioned disguises, as well as travels and jesting speech that is, at times, difficult to interpret. As Sylvie moves between liberty and captivity, between her own striving for freedom and the threat of imprisonment, her body plays a double role as an object of persecution and a source of pleasure.

In this essay, I intend to show how Sylvie's recurrent bodily disguises work as a guiding metaphor to unlock the novel's distinctive play with dissimulation and difficulty of interpretation. The *Mémoires* are a textual system of instability – a game of ambivalence on many levels at once, of which Sylvie's disguises are the most apparent manifestation.

The varying forms of the body are variations on one constant, namely on the body as a battleground of asserted independence as well as of continually demon-

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strated subjection. And the body is everywhere: It awakens desire. It desires. It is violated in the name of desire. It is imprisoned as a result of this desire. To escape and avoid further imprisonment, it travels, geographically and also within gender, fleeing the female gender and taking on the cloak of manhood. This cross-dressing, as well as the other forms of travel, are not undertaken merely in the name of safety, but for enjoyment. The body shifts from being a place of exploitation and threat to one of enjoyment. The novel thus shows the invention of a playful strategy to attain agency in a situation in which such agency is limited.

Sylvie's dissimulation or disguise on multiple narrative levels is the key to Villedieu's intricately constructed novel and the many ways it enacts dissimulation, while also demonstrating its importance as a measure for self-preservation under the reign of Louis XIV, especially for women. The need for dissimulation in its multiple and agnate forms is related to the political climate, its way of dealing with what deviated from the ideals of standardization and centralization, whether as political dissidence or as a lack of adherence to norms.

Sylvie's life story echoes that of its author on many points. Like Marie-Catherine Desjardins, who wrote under the pen name Villedieu, her novel character is unorthodox, and often outrageous. Like Sylvie, Villedieu expressed her own desire, writing erotic poetry to a named lover, with whom she lived. Like Sylvie's fictional lover, Villedieu's lover rewarded her declarations of love by jilting her, breaking off their engagement and making their love letters public, intensifying the scandal which surrounded its female writer.

Sylvie reflects certain aspects of her author's life in that they both tell a story which rebels against notions of the rigidly codified norms of the *grand siècle* (Démoris 2003, 8). While the impossibility of happiness through passionate love shows the influence of *précieuse* thought, Sylvie's search for freedom and pleasure resonates with the contemporary influence of Epicureanism. Epicureanism for early modern philosophers was "almost synonymous with atheism, and so with the denial of divine creation, providence, the immortality of the soul, heaven and hell, and moral right and wrong" (Wilson 2009, 266). The freedom from the idea of a fixed order suggests that we are all free to construct our own worlds, to move between given (gender) roles, as well as invent literary formats. Sylvie's free attitude to morality or amorality is thus directly connected to the spread of this philosophy. There is often a Jansenist perception in Villedieu's writings of an unnatural or adulterated world which is no longer ordered by a given system, but it is what Sophie Houdard has called a Jansenism without a "nostalgia for God" and without sin (2004, 228). In Villedieu's fiction, the incredible can therefore become thinkable.

As Villedieu's work is influenced by libertine freethinking, Sylvie's many disguises can be related to a libertine *jeux de citation* visible in the *Mémoires* (Hou-

dard 2004, 230). These citations – which include the use of the famous name of Molière, or Sylvie's encounter with real-life libertine poet Des Barreaux, as well as references to other intertexts – contribute to the intentional difficulties of decoding or placing the text. As the playwright Molière himself chose his alias according to a custom of actors and playwrights naming themselves after a *faux fief* or made-up place in imitation of the nobility, Sylvie in echoing this underlines her status as theatrical actor, appearing in disguise.

An Intricate Literary Form

Sylvie's many disguises correspond to the multi-layered levels of irony and dissimulation used in the novel. Difficulties of interpretation hound the text on every level: in its genre, its style, its intended reader, author, and level of narration. The text is written at the height of Classicism, yet Villedieu uses elements that are often considered baroque, such as disguise, disorder and metamorphosis. This creates a pervasive conflict between appearance and truth (Leggett 1993, 92; Démoris 2003, 16). The novel also makes use of two innovative forms: the pseudo-memoir and the epistolary novel. The letters are written by Sylvie and addressed to an anonymous, high-ranking, female protector addressed as "Princesse" or "Votre Altesse" (Your Highness). In her letters, she explains her need to justify herself to a world that has slandered her and used her in their "romans" (novels), or stories about her. This defence of herself is echoed in her justification for speaking at all: while it is considered immodest in a woman, Sylvie justifies it by the interest shown by the reader of her letters, and Sylvie's own corresponding wish to amuse her powerful friend. The direct address is reminiscent of the importance of the art of conversation and wit in salon culture and constructs a dialogical loyalty between writer and reader.

Villedieu's innovation of the pseudo-memoir represented a break with an earlier convention of memoirs being reserved for affairs of state, and would quickly inspire others to copy her as well as publish their own, genuine memoirs (Démoris 2003, 29). The pseudo-memoir also becomes part of the jest between author and reader, ironically underlining the difference between the seriousness and importance of the memoirs of state and the simple story of a woman of seemingly little political importance. This genre choice can in turn be related to the importance of rewriting historiography in the works of Villedieu (Decker Lalande 2000, 24; Warkander 2022, 147). The choice of the two genres together has the effect (through proto-feminist irony) of fracturing modes of narration.

Even within these forms, the narration takes place on several levels at once. In keeping with the literary conventions of the time, the novel contains maxims, intercepted letters to lovers (transcribed within the letters to the Princess) and a story marked out from the master narrative by a separate heading. The combined effect of these diegetic forms is to open the narrative to uncertainty. In a sense, they keep reminding the reader that words, as material as the body, are just as prone to disguise.

Even Sylvie's reputation is fractured, as she is the object of many rumours that she protests are false. The many rumours that circulate about her twist reality through words. Sylvie enters into the game of disguise with her physical body, finding a way to one-up her slanderers.

The Body of Henriette-Sylvie

An illegitimate child born to unknown parents and, later, a widow twice over, Sylvie is doubly marginal in a patriarchal and hierarchical society. The play with truth and fiction which she engages in relates to the issue of self-staging as a means of wielding power in a society of dissimulation, and connects to the historiographical practices of absolutism. Weaponization of appearance and dissimulation were particularly important for women, whose position to a high degree depended on their reputation for that supreme female virtue, chastity. Sylvie uses her body instrumentally in many games of identity. She initially appears in the role of the "desirable woman," but later takes on the identity of other women as well as men. Even the initial role of "scandalous beauty" is a role that Sylvie creates for herself in the text.

On the first page of the first part of her self-narrated story, Sylvie paints a portrait of herself. She specifies her "bonne mine" (good appearance), her different features and "admirable" figure, and says that "on en voit bien peu de pareilles [. . .] je suis quasi une beauté achévée" (one sees few women such as I [. . .] from head to toe I am a complete beauty) (Villedieu 2003, 44; 2004, 27). By doing so, she signals her awareness of the central importance that her body holds in the events that befall her, and the interest that her physical beauty will have for the reader: "Ceux qui croiront [. . .] que je me peins ainsi à plaisir [. . .] aimeront toujours mieux l'idée d'une belle personne que celle d'une laide, ou ils seront gens de mauvais goût" (Those who [. . .] may believe that I am merely joking with them [. . .] will nonetheless be more pleased with the idea of a beautiful person, than an ugly one, or they are people who have no taste) (Villedieu 2003, 44; 2004, 27).

Sylvie's body is not described by her as an inanimate or anonymous object of beauty; in her depiction, it expresses Sylvie's personality. Her personality is intimately entwined with her body, and the ineffable concept of charm makes up a considerable part of her self-described powers of attraction. Her "yeux [. . .] brillants" (brilliant [. . .] eyes) signal "assez d'esprit" (a good deal of wit). Her mouth, which laughs "toujours" (all the time) (Villedieu 2003, 44; 2004, 27), compounds the image of playfulness, and even jesting.

While the genre of the literary portrait was widespread at the time of the novel's publication, Sylvie's choice to write her own portrait further underlines her agency in the shaping of her destiny as well as in the telling of it – two parallel, but separate, acts of creation. Within these first paragraphs, Villedieu as author and Sylvie as narrator have thus already presented the double nature of the text, which features in so many aspects of it. The story exists as plot, and also as a self-conscious narrative, which Sylvie repeatedly draws her reader's attention to – the reader also being doubled, as the intradiegetic recipient of her letters and the extradiegetic reader of the novel.

Sylvie's disguises, both as a woman and as a man, are first entered into to escape imprisonment and pursuit for situations created by the effect of her bodily beauty on others. As a small child, one man finds her so beautiful and charming that he pays to have her placed in a foster family. When she is a young girl, her foster father becomes enamoured of her and attempts to rape her; whereupon she shoots and kills him, and is forced to flee from justice. Later, her disguises counteract the loss of interest she suffers at the hands of her lover, as she dresses up as his new mistress in order to spend the night with him again. In both cases, the disguise works as a counterpoint to the excess or lack of her own body, and functions as a safeguard, insulating her from the reactions of the world around her.

Through the six books of the *Mémoires*, the story of Sylvie's body is defined by its existence on the outskirts of society. This begins early, marking her very entrance into the world. In an analepsis, Sylvie describes how she was born, on the edge of a wood near the sea. Her mother came to the area in a boat, which was then burned, and departed with her equally anonymous companions "à la faveur des ténèbres" (in the shadow of the night) (Villedieu 2003, 45; 2004, 27), leaving no trace of her identity and whereabouts. Sylvie's body is thus brought into the world under irregular circumstances that involve anonymity, secrecy and distance from civilization. The beginning of her life coincides with the beginning of her "career" on the fringes of society, as she is born not in a house, but in a forest, at night, of a woman whose name is never revealed, and who disappears from the scene immediately following her delivery of the baby. Sylvie's very name, which means "of the woods," denotes this presence of the "natural" world

in opposition to the codes of civilization.[1] Villedieu's literary dissolution of given hierarchies and order again shows the influence of Epicurean thinking and its "rejection of de facto hierarchies" (Wilson 2009, 286). More effectively than if she had been an orphan, Sylvie is untethered from the framework of family, class and origins. She is from the very beginning unknown, and therefore can be everything and nothing at once.

The socializing force of the mother is noticeably absent from Sylvie's life. Not for her the strict guiding hand of Madame de Chartres in Madame de Lafayette's *La Princesse de Clèves* (1678), who raises her daughter with exemplary morality and deeply anchored notions of what is fitting or *bienséant* for a woman. Instead, Sylvie is abandoned, and left to her own devices, her beauty and the actions of those who surround her. Sylvie becomes more autonomous, but also, in a sense, more vulnerable than the princess of Clèves. As opposed to this wealthy and well attended figure, Sylvie has greater freedom of movement, but is also physically and materially exposed to any man who takes an interest in her.

Indeed, the objectification of Sylvie's body seems to direct her fate. After she shoots her foster father, Sylvie is saved from criminal prosecution by a man who also desires her. When his passion is discovered, his mistress tries to have Sylvie jailed, and she is transferred to a castle to be kept safe. The son of the family falls in (reciprocated) love with her; when his mother discovers their romance, she manages to have Sylvie locked up in a convent, from which she can only be extracted with the help of another gallant, who is seduced by her adolescent beauty. Thus, she is alternately chased, imprisoned or freed as a result of the desire she awakens in others, and their fear in response to this desire. Sylvie is locked up in abbeys, houses, prisons, castles, either directly, in order to imprison her, or indirectly, to protect her from imprisonment and prosecution. Her confinement coincides with her transgressive bodily behaviour.

Disguises, Doubleness and Dissimulation

The importance of the body is a central theme, along with its constant metamorphoses. Sylvie's meaningful opening statement that "je n'ai jamais bien su qui j'étais" (I have never known with certainty who I am) (Villedieu 2003, 44; 2004, 27), is essential to understanding her character as well as that of the novel. This uncertainty is illustrated not only in the circumstances of her birth, but in her repeated

1 Sylvie is also a common name in pastoral novels, notably in Honoré d'Urfé's *roman-fleuve*, *L'Astrée* (1607–1627), a connotation that further underlines the literary quality of Sylvie's life.

disguises. The body, threatened with imprisonment or used as a means to freedom, is constantly transforming. With Sylvie's changing appearance, the body is concretely implicated in a matter of self-fashioning. Indeed, she cross-dresses with a frequency and dedication remarkable even for the cross-dressing literature of the time. It is narration, even beyond the sophistication of text. Although it might be seen merely as comical relief and a literary device, there is a strong argument to be made that cross-dressing in early modern France meant engaging in a "sophisticated dialogue about the self, the sexes, and the society of the time" (Wise 2000, 131).

Sylvie's first husband is a jealous and possessive Spanish count, and shortly after her marriage, gossip, full of "cruelles impostures [. . .] a voulu [. . .] obscurcir l'éclat de mon innocence et la pureté de mes actions" (cruel falsehoods [. . .] sought to tarnish my innocence and the purity of my behavior) (Villedieu 2003, 85; 2004, 57), accusing her of adultery. "Il n'était pas aisé de tromper un Espagnol" (it was not so easy to fool a Spaniard) (Villedieu 2003, 84; 2004, 56), and, having become suspicious of her conduct, he seeks to lock her up in one of his houses. To escape, she and her lady-in-waiting dress up as men and leave Brussels, travelling through Luxemburg to reach Nancy. Once there, Sylvie maintains her disguise both as a safety measure, and to "jouer quelquefois avec une belle fille [. . .] à qui [. . .] ma bonne mine apprenait à aimer un homme" (a beautiful daughter with whom we amused ourselves sometimes [. . .] it was my handsome face that taught her to fall in love with a man) (Villedieu 2003, 87; 2004, 58). Leaving Nancy for Champagne, Sylvie maintains her man's clothes and adds an accent, passing herself off as the German playboy, the Prince of Salmes: "Je m'y établis [la] reputation d'un Allemand fort galant et fort dangereux pour le beau sexe" (I very quickly got the reputation of being a most gallant German and quite dangerous to the beautiful sex) (Villedieu 2003, 87; 2004, 58). She not only manages to dress successfully as a man, but to enjoy her forced disguise, and becomes so absorbed in it that she takes on the practices of a man, and seduces women. Thus, the tables are turned, as she engages in deeper identity-troubling practices and effectively switches positions in this gendered game of seducing and being seduced, acting and being acted on. This also shows the arbitrariness of the double standard of seduction, as she indulges freely as a man in practices that she was punished for as a woman. Thus, Sylvie uses her body in order to overcome the limitations imposed on her by that same body, and to transform it through her actions from something that limits her agency to something that increases it; by an act which in itself is a demonstration of the ascendancy of her will over her physical circumstances. Through her chosen disguise – acting on her own body – she circumvents the way that the world acts on her body.

Sylvie's play with her identity, who she really is as opposed to who she is supposed to or appears to be, is taken to yet more dizzying heights. As she rides around Champagne early in the morning with her (also cross-dressed) lady-in-waiting, they have "la première rencontre digne de nous" ([t]he first encounter worthy of us) (Villedieu 2003, 87; 2004, 58), a remarkable statement by this point in the narrative. Close to a "maison superbe" (superb house), a rider charges at them "à bride abbatue" (at full gallop) (Villedieu 2003, 88; 2004, 59). The rider, thrown at their feet by her horse, turns out to be a woman in man's clothing. She apologizes, but when Sylvie's lady-in-waiting accidentally calls her "Madame," she realizes that they too are *travesties* or cross-dressed and, "se relevant toute furieuse" (getting up filled with fury), says that "le destin [. . .] m'offre une occasion si belle" (Fortune [. . .] offered me such a wonderful opportunity), and challenges Sylvie to a duel (Villedieu 2003, 89; 2004, 59). The cross-dressed rider, in fact, believes Sylvie to be the woman who has stolen her lover – a woman with a German accent who is known to cross-dress. Although Sylvie is surprised, and "admirais [. . .] l'aventure" (thought the encounter admirable), she "fus à la fin obligée de me defendre pour sauver ma vie" ([i]n the end, I was obliged to defend myself to save my life) (Villedieu 2003, 89–90; 2004, 60). This she does with alacrity, and "poussant mon ennemie qui réculait, je lui portais enfin une estocade dans le corps" (pressing my enemy, who was retreating, I finally gave her a sword thrust in the middle of her body) (Villedieu 2003, 90; 2004, 60). Successfully fighting against a supposed rival for her life, she has yet again gone from merely cross-dressing to adopting bodily practices associated with masculinity.

After arriving in Paris, Sylvie charms many women at Versailles in her disguise as the young German Prince of Salmes. One of them is so important that it is impossible to refuse her the trysts that she demands. She gives Sylvie three days to prepare, and, as in a fable, Sylvie magically finds a solution. Meeting her old lover d'Englesac by chance, Sylvie twists and extends the flexibility of her identity a little further still, and sends d'Englesac, impersonating her, as the handsome German to the lady, to fulfill the promise her body can't keep. D'Englesac "était beau, d'une taille approchante de la mienne, et pouvait passer pour moi en un besoin" (was handsome, of a height close to mine, and could pass for me if need be) (Villedieu 2003, 103; 2004, 70). The couple thus share the lady between them, Sylvie by day and d'Englesac by night, while the lady all the while believes that she is being courted by the Prince of Salmes.

At one point Sylvie is nearly forced to make love to the woman and thus reveal her gender, when the cuckolded husband breaks in. The lady flees, and her husband nearly kills Sylvie, until, stripping her naked, he sees her female body. Instead of killing her, he passes "de sa colère à une douleur profonde, d'avoir tant maltraité, comme il disait, une si belle chose" (from anger to a deep sorrow for having

so mistreated, as he said, such a lovely thing) (Villedieu 2003, 105; 2004, 71). As ultimate guarantor of truth in this intricately twisted situation, her body is naturally confusing. The fact that the lady doesn't know how to interpret what has happened once the husband tells her, while Sylvie knows about the circumstances, could be interpreted as a freethinking stance – a protest against superstition that makes a mockery of possible occult interpretations. At the same time, the nature of the female body stands out, in contrast to the threat posed by the (supposedly) male body, as "une si belle chose" that can be "maltraité." This man's gaze on Sylvie, unlike her own as it appears in her written portrait, reduces her body to a (beautiful) thing and a thing that can be mistreated, rather than act itself.

The physical likeness between Sylvie and d'Englesac, apart from being necessary for the plot, stresses the androgynous nature of Sylvie's body as well as that of the man whom she not only loves but seems to consider as a playmate. This likeness also serves to emphasize a gratuitous difference in treatment of bodies perceived as female or as male, which is reiterated in many different forms.

In the novel's unending kaleidoscopic exploration of identity, facts, and who maintains control over them, Salmes, without knowing of Sylvie's impersonation of him, will later claim to have had a love affair with her. Effectively slandering her in order to further his own reputation as a rake, he again reveals the double standard of sexual conduct for male and female bodies, and the reasons that Sylvie has for taking on the freedom of the other gender, or of other identities altogether.

In spite of Sylvie's actions and her active self-fashioning, her body thus continues to be perceived as an object by the outer world. Her lover d'Englesac and the Prince of Salmes dine together one night, and, "parmi les plats qu'on leur servit à souper, nous autres dames que l'on met partout, nous en fîmes un autre pour leur entretien pendant le repas" (among the dishes that were served, we ladies, who are talked about everywhere, were served up as entertainment during the meal) (Villedieu 2003, 121; 2004, 82). Sylvie thus sees herself, and other women, treated not only as a "si belle chose" but as a "pla[t] qu'on [. . .] servit à souper": a dish, a delicacy to be consumed alongside others in the homosocial company of young, aristocratic men.

Depictions of Bodily Constraint

The staging of the political-physical submission of women's bodies is present in many works of literature contemporary with the *Mémoires*; they demonstrate the possibility, or rather impossibility, for women to act in those arenas reserved for men. In "No Man's Land: The Novel's First Geography," Joan DeJean stresses the

monarchy's political aim to keep women out of the centre of power (1987, 182). This might equally well be seen as keeping them in: within bounds, within constraints. The recurring theme of imprisonment is a demonstration of an inequity of political power and distance from the centre of political power of the *Mémoires*, and has many parallels in contemporary novels. Being a woman, and being a subject, translates into being shut in, and kept apart. The aspect of power aside, physical enclosure might serve to exalt emotional transport, making emotional ardour a substitute for physical motion.

The convent is a popular figure for an external law regulating inner unruliness and passions. In the *Lettres portugaises* (1669), often attributed to Gabriel de Guilleragues, the feelings of the amorous nun and narrator are related to her physical confinement. Often, female protagonists are held remote from a centre of action or a sphere of influence in convents or far-away castles. Already in Lafayette's *La Princesse de Montpensier* (1661), the young heroine is susceptible to her emotional turmoil in large part due to her isolation, alone in the countryside without family or friends. Her husband who goes off to war ignores her, and when her old beau appears she falls prey to her former feelings. Once their affair has been discovered, he moves away and leaves her for another woman, who is able to play the role of mistress more skilfully than the teenage princess. Unable to control her own comings and goings, and indeed to leave her remote castle, she receives few impressions or distractions that can eradicate tragedy and passionate love from her mind. Therefore, the influence of her passion is undiminished, while her former lover quickly forgets their torrid affair. A similar theme is observable in the ending of *La Princesse de Clèves*, when the princess's feelings remain unaltered in her isolation while de Nemours' are changed in response to the animated world in which he resides.

The correlation between strong passions and enclosed bodies is compatible with Diderot's and Rousseau's observation later on that erotic passion is above all the result of indolence and a surplus of time (Laqueur 1990, 10). Passionate love, it would seem, is above all a trap for women, whose bodies are so controlled in their movement that intensity of emotion becomes stronger, as they are "carried away" by their feelings rather than bodies.

In that light, Sylvie's many travels are a means of escaping the straitened world of womanhood. In the *Mémoires*, the body is a locus of emotional transport, but at the same time its activity protects Sylvie from this excess of emotion. The distance of a princess or a nun from the capital is their distance from influence over their own destiny, or from the centre of political power. That is why Sylvie's travels are so important, because she takes matters into her own hands and decides to voyage towards the centre of power, and in so doing, moves towards the centre of power over her own life. The mobility of her body takes another form

in her travels, as they also shift her out of a fixed and known position into one which, as the theme of travel indicates, is about *becoming*. Travel is another aspect of the self-fashioning inherent in disguise, and the mutability that keeps Sylvie from becoming caught in interpretation. The aim of escaping interpretation is to escape the very control and legal threats of imprisonment and lawsuits, often transmitted via the monarchy, that Sylvie spends a considerable amount of time fleeing.

In Villedieu's play *Manlius* (1662), constraint and imprisonment lead to a different result. The noble Manlius, unjustly suspected of treason by his father, accepts his resulting imprisonment in a gesture of filial subjugation. His unconditional acceptance eventually earns him absolute freedom and the recognition of his moral superiority. The difference between Manlius and Sylvie lies of course in the respective genres of which they are the protagonists, with the royal genre of the theatre more prone to heroic deeds, and the novel more so to irony and *double-entendres*. But there is also the question of gender. Were Sylvie to accept her more or less covert imprisonment, in a fixed role if not in a convent-jail, it would not be considered heroic but rather as par for the course. The compensation for the sacrifice would never be an ensuing freedom, but only the (lack of dis-) approval that comes with following a given course. Acceptance and subjugation would not earn absolute freedom, but continued confinement.

Appearances and the Law – Society, Power and Dissimulation

The limitations placed on women and the arenas in which they were allowed agency is related to the political events preceding the commencement of the absolutist reign of Louis XIV. This absolutism was directly tied to the defeat of the rebels in the Fronde. The civil war, which was to a significant extent instigated and developed by women, ended the possibility of a decrease in the centralization of power to the king, and greater political influence for women. Compared to a sixteenth-century feminism that mainly served to defend women against virulent attacks on their nature and capacities, the seventeenth century takes an offensive stance full of initiative, signalled precisely by the double female regency of the *grand siècle* (DeJean 1991, 20).

One aspect of the *Mémoires* is the way that it creates space to imagine a differently organized political world. The pseudo-memoir is only vaguely set in a certain year. This makes it possible to imagine the story in a universe slightly outside of time, and therefore of history. Even though it makes reference to political

and social events of the 1660s, the first decade of the absolutism of Louis XIV, the novel through its vagueness also imagines a time without this king. The queen mother Anne of Austria features more prominently in the novel than the absent Louis XIV. As the king is always away when sought, it is the queen who must resolve many situations. Thus, power comes to once again reside in the hands of women, as during the Fronde. In imagining a world where power was portioned out differently, the novel as genre "played a complex and not easily defined role – part model, part inspiration, eventually outlet for the newly aggressive energy" (DeJean 1991, 20). The *Mémoires*' nostalgic reference to heroic women and amazons is another example of transvestitism, transvestitism of power, where the King becomes the Queen, or vice versa.

The relativization of gender roles through cross-dressing is amenable to imagining female political power. The possibility of referring to historical women is also a way for Villedieu to anchor the radical existence of Sylvie's life in historical events that challenge a patriarchal order that was only strengthened with the onset of absolutism. Even if France had an abundance of *femmes fortes* or "generous women," standards of behaviour remained rigid, whether or not "actual female learning and bravery [were considered] 'random' occurrences" by the 1670s (DeJean 1991, 33). The intensity of Sylvie's striving for independence is visible in the strength of the obstacles that encircle and hinder her. Just as the intensity of amorous passion seems to grow in physical isolation, Sylvie's lust for freedom appears to be strengthened by the never-ceasing threat of being held captive, literally, in her body, and figuratively, as the moral outrage her actions (or presumed actions) give rise to shows. This anger and its tangible effects on her physical liberty illustrate the strength of the confines of acceptable feminine conduct in the French world of the post-Fronde.

The second half of the seventeenth century in France was greatly occupied with the restructuring and redistribution of power. After the French civil wars of 1648–1653, the fraught political climate was at once contained and exacerbated by the absolute monarchy put in place by Louis XIV after the death of cardinal Mazarin. In France, the seventeenth century represented the culmination of a transition from an order in which aristocrats had relative independence and political power of their own to one where the aristocrat was relegated to becoming a courtier, subservient to political games in order to gain a power parceled out by the king (Elias 1983). This entailed having to use skills of persuasion and concealment to be successful, resulting in a culture where power was increasingly awarded based on social or emotional performative ability. Staging, performativity and narrative control of one's persona was often imperative in achieving social and economic success.

Moreover, the need to guard one's reputation was doubled for women. Although the onus on women to protect their reputations was nothing new, the recent unrest had allowed a number of aristocratic women to take part in the political manoeuvres and even on the battlefield. Many of the most influential actors in the Fronde were women, such as the duchess de Montpensier or the duchess de Longueville (DeJean 1991, 38; Broad and Green 2009, 180; Carrier 2003). The military exploits and transvestitism by the heroic women who plotted against the king and fought in the civil war or the Fronde clearly serve as inspiration for Sylvie's persona.[2] After the Fronde, the sphere of women's activity again narrowed, and agency in these conditions had to take on other, more subterranean forms, such as literature.[3]

Narration is a means to gaining power over events, transforming tangible events by way of storytelling. This echoes the way Sylvie conquers the material nature of her supposedly female body by disguising it by choice. At the same time, the possibility of an objective truth is called into question.

Writing as Rarefied Disguise

Sylvie continually works to destabilize and dismantle a fixed idea of the truth, be it through her bodily disguises, or through her use of an ironic and playful tone in her narration that makes it difficult to be sure of what can be taken at face value. These different tools are as many ways of attempting to intervene in the plot of her life as well as to control how her story is presented, and therefore understood. The end of her numerous adventures is reached when she decides to give up intervening in the raw materials or the story of her life to instead focus on the telling of it.

Throughout the *Mémoires*, Sylvie makes reference to the *romans*, novels, or *fables* that are told about her life. It is as if her life is created in part by others, as they assume ownership of it and of her by using her name for their own stories. These invented or exaggerated stories come to constitute Sylvie's life in the eyes of others as something different from her experience, as her body is seen as a "si

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2 "The exploits of the female leaders of the Fronde are truly the stuff of escapist fiction. [. . .] More than any other conflict in French history, the Fronde can be seen as a woman's war" (DeJean 1991, 37).

3 While women writers had reaped great success, most notably so for novelist Madeleine de Scudéry, female authorship was still controversial. Madame de Villedieu was the only woman of her generation to subsist solely by her pen.

belle chose" or a "plat" through external eyes. By ceasing to participate in the world, she can no longer be seen and thus interpreted by others at all. Instead, she withdraws to a protected sphere, with the purpose of taking on intentional and full control of the telling of her life.

After numerous adventures, Sylvie decides to retire to a convent of her own free will. Her withdrawal from the world, the choice of a simple life filled with friendship, and the avoidance of pain, echo the ideal of the Garden of Epicurus, and constitute a reflection on the plight of women, who can find peace only in separation from the world and its passions. The abbess de Cologne encourages her to write her life instead of gathering more material:

> vous verrez qu'il surviendra quelque nouveau malheur qui vous fera sentir tous les autres, et qui vous réduira au désespoir; [. . .] rétirez-vous avec moi dans ma solitude, et venez vous y mettre à couvert de tous les orages qui pourraient vous arriver; faites un peu de reflexion sur tous les incidents de votre vie, et voyez combien vous avez éprouvé de traverses depuis que vous tuâtes Monsieur de Molière. [. . .] Il y en a de quoi fournir un gros roman. (Villedieu 2003, 219)

> You will see that a misfortune will occur that will reduce you to despair. [. . .] Retire with me to my solitude, and shelter yourself from the storms that threaten you. Reflect on all the events of your life, see how many difficulties you have had since you killed Monsieur de Molière. There is enough material for a long novel. (Villedieu 2004, 150–151)

Whereas Sylvie in the first book boldly proclaims that "rien n'est impossible à l'amour qui veut sortir d'un couvent" (nothing is impossible for a woman in love when she wants to escape from a convent) (Villedieu 2003, 66; 2004, 42), the convent here becomes the representation of a retreat undertaken to make sense and order of tumultuous stories, and the need to compose narratives apart from the maelstrom of life (Boursier 1993, 110–112). The retreat from the world, a theme of *repos* that would be famously invoked at the end of *La Princesse de Clèves*, represents escape from an oppressive political order and heterosexual economy. Instead of participating as a body in the world, Sylvie could finally assume full authorship over her adventures, and control the telling and framing of them fully. When she chooses to do this, this also, fittingly or ironically, signals the end of the novel.

This transition from acting to telling further stresses the fictional potential of the events told in Sylvie's letters. Instead of conveying information clearly, storytelling is used as a means of muddling one's tracks. In so doing, the continued striving to obscure interpretation and obstruct the conveying of an absolute or graspable truth is again emphasized. Narration is a way to throw off the scent. In this way, the *Mémoires* convey that everything is a story, and that the existence of a story resides not in objective information but in the continually made choices

of narration. On a larger scale, the transition from action to writing is itself a mirror of what DeJean describes as the transition from political action to literature after the defeat in the Fronde. The fact that Sylvie calls the rumours about her – which are often the reason that she must flee, so as not to be imprisoned – *romans* or "novels," is another nod to the absorption of agency into the symbolic field of literature. Throughout her narration, Sylvie frequently uses the vocabulary of fiction, and she on several occasions observes herself as leading a "vie de roman." Besides saying that one of her adventures resembles a chivalric romance, she likens one of her lovers to the legendary knight of chivalric romance Amadis de Gaula, while another is accused of getting his tactics for love affairs from reading *L'Astrée*.

The naming of two of the most recognizable chivalric novels of the time underlines the fictionality in Sylvie's story, and, fundamentally, the fictionality or storytelling inherent in any relation of facts. As others have made "fables" of her, Sylvie turns the stories of them into fables. At the same time, she seems to treat her own storytelling with the same degree of distance. When the marquise de Séville, who is possibly her estranged mother, searches for her throughout France, finally ending up at the king's wedding, Sylvie comments on her looking in the wrong place with: "Le mariage du roi n'était pas une conclusion de roman, où tous les personnages se dussent retrouver" (The marriage of the king was not the end of a novel in which all the heroic characters find themselves reunited) (Villedieu 2003, 73; 2004, 48).

In the *Mémoires*, symbolic and physical exertion of power are linked through illustrations of the material consequences of other peoples' words. During her travels, Sylvie realizes that her scandalous reputation not only follows but precedes her, and that the nature of gossip removes her story from her ownership, twisting it into a weapon against her in royal courts as well as at courts of law. When Sylvie unmasks a woman who wishes to appear virtuous, the latter exacts vengeance by managing to convince others that Sylvie "menai[t] une vie déréglée" (was leading a dissolute life) (Villedieu 2003, 209; 2004, 143):

> Toutes les informations que feue madame d'Englesac avait autrefois fait faire pour me perdre, furent de nouveau tirées des greffes. On remit sur pied les calomnies, dont toutes nos procédures étaient pleines; le dernier arrêt du parlement de Grenoble ne fut pas oublié; et les ordres qu'on avait autrefois obtenus de la Reine mère ayant été je ne sais comment recouvrés, je fus toute étonnée que le chevalier du Buisson vint me dire qu'on en sollicitait un nouveau pour me faire mettre dans un couvent, et qu'on était sur le point de l'obtenir. (Villedieu 2003, 209–210)

> All the evidence that the deceased Madame d'Englesac had put together to destroy me was brought out of the files. All the slander our lawsuits had been full of was circulated about again. The last order of the parlement of Grenoble was not forgotten, nor the orders that had formerly been obtained from the queen mother, which were found somehow or other. I

> was very surprised when the Chevalier du Buisson came to tell me that they were trying to get a new order to have me put in a convent and that they were on the verge of getting it. (Villedieu 2004, 143–144)

The opinion of Sylvie as "dissolute" manifestly entails a threat to her legal freedom, and the idea of her body as transgressive directly translates into the idea of imprisoning it. Therefore, her choice to become the author of her own story instead of an actor in it is important – it is the final demonstration of her self-conscious creation of truth and identity; which shows us as her readers that the whole novel is a revelation of an intricate staging of dissimulation, an exercise in murkiness. The importance of staging, fashioning, and verbal and bodily rhetoric is continually displayed on all narrative levels of this elaborate work of art. Mastering the codes of self-presentation is an important strategy for women under the absolutist reign of Louis XIV: one way of controlling presentation is by making it impossible to ever reach a final, stable interpretation.

Clearly, Sylvie is both exposed to the harmful rhetoric of others and also capable of using her understanding of the power of rhetoric to her advantage. When her enemies have won the right to imprison her and her lover, she chooses to come out of hiding and, by performing her nobility of heart for the queen, try to win back their freedom. Sylvie gives a performance of the purity of her love which is akin to a monologue in a romance, saying:

> Je viens, s'il le faut, renoncer à lui pour jamais, et avouer la calomnie, en me rendant prisonnière; que Votre Majesté ait pitié seulement de lui, et qu'elle commande qu'on le laisse en repos.
>
> Et j'accompagnais ce noble transport de beaucoup d'autres ornements que je ne dis pas; ce qui eut la grâce de la nouveauté, et produisit quelque chose de bon; car la Reine s'en divertit. (Villedieu 2003, 126)

> I am come to give him up forever, if necessary, to agree that the slanders are true, and to make myself a prisoner, if only Your Majesty will have pity on him and will order that he be left alone.
>
> I accompanied this noble speech with many other ornaments, which I will not mention; they had the charm of novelty and produced a good result, for the queen was amused by it. (Villedieu 2004, 86)

In this moment, Sylvie understands and abides by the correct codes, "amusing" the queen at the same time as she shows her understanding of the codes of gallantry, excusing her actions through a display of self-sacrifice. Her skill in storytelling wins her and d'Englesac's freedom, just as the stories of others have threatened it. And that is the genre-crossing novel's central point: storytelling as a game of power, where holding the key to interpretation is potentially the only

source of power available to those dispossessed of real tangible financial and political influence – as well as a threat to them.

Conclusion

A foundling child in an aristocratic world under the absolute monarchy of Louis XIV, Sylvie is a freethinking innovation in an equal degree to the genre that conveys her story. Sylvie is quite literally unbound to any patri- or matrilineage. At the same time, the consequences that she suffers are clearly that of a certain era's view of what is proper for the bodies of women. Henriette-Sylvie transcends her own body while being simultaneously directed by it, as her agency in creating her own unprecedented life is coupled with constant reminders of her subjugation to those with greater material power.

Sylvie's and others' use of disguises is incorporated in the continuous masking of the truth. Sylvie's body marks this unreliability with its many disguises and changes. The text, like its heroine, is often in disguise. Sylvie's awareness of and use of narrative control and confusion or *dissimulation* should be related to the inequity of power she faces as a woman without money or an aristocratic name. They indicate attempts to control her own story.

Villedieu's work reconsiders the writing of history itself, which has to such a high degree erased female agency. Her writings are important in their relation to the representation of truth as something that is not objective but always vied for and fought over. In the *Mémoires*, Villedieu exemplifies that unreliability of history which she points to in her preface to the *Annales galantes* (1670) among other texts. In the *Mémoires*, as in her inventions of new genres, Villedieu's writings reshape the world, what is possible to imagine, and to word (Cuénin 1991, 239).

Sylvie's body is dressed up in many different ways. It appears as a beautiful and attractive object; it is disguised in the identity of other women in order to protect its own; it transforms into that of a man, sometimes even performing sexually with other women to a degree that might baffle the reader of today's notion of early modern depictions of sexuality. Beyond this, its destiny is shaped by the stories that are told about it, by Sylvie's enemies and by Sylvie herself, that together create different ideas and images of its nature.

In a time of ever-increasing censorship, this cross-dressing adventurer not only illustrates the limitations placed on women, but explores radical alternatives for them. Villedieu's novel of a woman writing her life story highlights the expectations of women and women's writing in early modern France. As the novel plays with novelistic convention, Sylvie's self-consciousness and self-staging is juxtaposed with

the way she herself is treated as, reduced to, or passed off as a story. Villedieu's novel, with its meta-textuality and its heterogeneity "explodes the traditional categories for reading women's lives and their writing" (Kuizenga 2004, 14).

Sylvie is time and again threatened with imprisonment in response to what is perceived as her transgressive behaviour, but finally voluntarily moves herself to a place of retirement. Her final retreat from the world, when she retreats to a convent of female friendship, connects with a *précieuse* and Epicurean tradition of disavowing the "adventures" of passionate love in favour of the benefits of reliable friendship – and expresses a criticism of this world of dissimulation and power struggles.

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Carin Franzén

Queen Christina's Heroism: The Writing of Maxims as a Way Through Subjectivation

Christina Queen of Sweden (1626–1689) has an established place in European cultural history, which appears to be built on her infamous deviations from what was expected of a female regent. In this chapter I want to assess some aspects of these deviations by rereading a selection of her 1,500 maxims collected by her secretaries in the 1680s under the titles *L'Ouvrage de loisir* [Work of leisure] and *Les sentiments héroïques* [Heroic sentiments] in order to understand what early modern freethinking could be for a woman.

My suggestion is that Christina's maxims can be regarded as a heroic search for an art of existence that articulates itself on the one hand as a Neo-Stoic form of self-control and on the other as a questioning of a rational self through a more sceptical and Epicurean attitude towards self-control. In addition to maxims aligned with the tradition of humanist analysis, there are also Christian maxims that sometimes accord with but also contradict this mainly Greco-Roman tradition. These three main veins – Christian, Stoic and Epicurean – intersect each other in her maxims, creating an indeterminate movement among them that, I would like to suggest, constitutes a characteristic trait of Christina's heroism. By rereading Christina's maxims in the context of the early modern freethinking tradition I will try to highlight how her maxims create a discursive space offering a possibility to transgress dominant norms of feminine subjectivity – that is, they enact a heroic strategy. As this suggestion is based on an idea of heroism that differs from more conventional conceptions of the term, I will take as my starting point a short summary of some of these customary descriptions.

The Concept of Heroism

The concept of heroism can be traced back to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* where it is described as a virtue opposed to bestiality. The description appears in a discussion of self-mastery. With Christianity heroic virtue becomes a perfect form of the dominance of reason over everything that is related to the level of animals and animality. According to bishop and theologian Albertus Magnus her-

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oism was “reason’s complete annihilation of the passions” (Fogelberg Rota and Hellerstedt 2015, 3).

Through the early modern period heroic virtue also became associated with a more individualistic view, as expressed in Cardinal Lorenzo Brancati da Laura’s treatise *De virtute heroica* (1668): this virtue “hominem ita perficit et adeo excellentem reddit, ut eum supra ceteros homines elevet et diis seu Deo similem in operano faciat” (perfects man and makes him excellent to such a degree that he becomes elevated above other men and similar to the gods or God) (Fogelberg Rota and Hellerstedt 2015, 5). In this sense the concept of heroism is also represented as a talent that certain subjects are gifted with. Examples often referred to during the early modern period are Alexander the Great or Caesar, which are also common references in Christina’s maxims, and it is significant that the Swedish queen took the name Kristina Alexandra in 1655 after her abdication. However, it is also interesting to note that Christina’s admiration for Alexander elevates him but at the same time admits his human weakness, as one maxim reads: “Alexandre, avec tous ses défauts, a été le plus grand des hommes” (Alexander, with all his faults, was the greatest of men) (Christina 1994, 251; 1753, 101).

During the early modern period, heroic virtue also became a concept connected to the ideology of absolute monarchy. This politically oriented conception of heroism in Christina’s life and writings has been explored by several scholars, for instance, by Stefano Fogelberg Rota (2015, 100), who highlights how heroic virtue is used “to underline the continuity between Christina’s reign and that of her father, Gustavus Adolphus. Her sovereignty should be guided, as his was, by reason, with which earthly passions are transcended.” If this virtue can be conceived as supporting or adding to the legitimation of her reign after her abdication, Fogelberg Rota (2015, 105) argues that heroic virtue becomes related to “Christina’s sacrifice of the throne for the sake of Catholicism.” However, as exemplifying moral or royal excellence this virtue is also scrutinized in Christina’s maxims, where she points to the weakness of reason and the forces of the passions.

In the following I will show how Christina’s maxims can be read as an exploration of the limits of these conventional conceptions of heroic virtue and thereby indicate that her style of heroism can also be detected in a freethinking resistance to the regulations of body, gender and the senses during the early modern period. The most important context for this tradition during the seventeenth century is to be found in the writings of French moralists and libertines. A brief introduction to this tradition is therefore helpful before we start our reading of Christina’s maxims.

A Freethinking Tradition: Moralists and Libertines

The freethinking tradition, which is often labelled as libertine, has been assessed as a "deviant renaissance" (Cavaillé 2013, 349) which gave rise to a philosophical thinking that in several ways ran counter to the religious doctrines prevalent in the sixteenth century. Furthermore, freethinking during this period is characterized on the one hand by an appropriation of classical learning based on Stoicism and Epicureanism, and on the other by an independence of judgement combined with a sceptical, critical mind. Perhaps the best known representative of this freethinking attitude is Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592). As Richard Scholar (2010, 8) describes Montaigne's essays, "they are writing trials of judgement that are always open to an afterthought, a change of mind, and a new flight from the errors of prejudice and habits." One of these "errors" was the belief in the humanist idea of human sovereignty, as Montaigne writes: "La presomption est notre maladie naturelle et originelle. La plus calamiteuse et fraile de toutes les creatures, c'est l'homme, et quant et quant la plus orgueilleuse" (Presumption is our natural and original malady. The most vulnerable and frail of all creatures is man, and at the same time the most arrogant) (Montaigne 1979, 118; 2003, 401).

This kind of critique of human presumption is also at the core of the writings of French moralists and libertines such as François de La Rochefoucauld (1613–1680) and Charles de Saint-Évremond (1613–1703). In the wake of Montaigne – who asked how it could be that man, this "miserable et chetive creature" (miserable and puny creature), pretended to be "maistresse et emperiere de l'univers" (master and emperor of the universe) (1979, 118; 2003, 399) – they continue his humanist analysis that merges scepticism with materialism and transgresses the Classical and Christian dichotomy of vice and virtue, of good and evil.

To get a more precise sense of the freethinking mind during the seventeenth century a good starting point could be the very French term *moraliste*. Its first appearance is to be found in dictionaries from the end of the seventeenth century, describing a person who promotes moral conduct, a meaning that still resonates in modern accounts of the term. According to Antoine Furetière's *Dictionnaire universel* (1690, 667), a moralist is one who deals with morals, defined as a "science qui enseigne à conduire la vie, les actions" [science that teaches how to conduct one's life, one's actions].[1] However, the moralists seldom teach anything. As Bérengère Parmentier (2000, 7) points out, nothing is more different from a moralist than a moralizer. While the latter is normative and preaches a moral doctrine with a didactic purpose, the former is descriptive and analytic.

1 If not indicated otherwise the translations from French into English are mine.

It is not so easy to draw a line between the two terms “moralist” and “libertine.” While moralists analyzed the *mores*, or manners and conduct among the mondain circles of French court society, the so-called libertines were more interested in developing an art of existence based on experience. However, these two freethinking veins shared a critical attitude that treats “learning with independence of judgment and a disarmingly light touch” indicated by a preference for genres such as maxims, reflections and essays (Scholar 2010, 7).

However, unlike the term *moraliste*, “libertine” (*libertin*) and “libertinism” (*libertinage*) were not used as self-designations during the early modern period but were rather applied as labels in order to stigmatize a certain lifestyle and liberty of thought that deviated from religious doctrines and official politics. It was not until the end of the nineteenth century that the terms were used in order to categorize “minor authors from the seventeenth century that did not get a place in the history of philosophy and represented a counter-movement opposing classicism” (Cavaillé 2017, 25). It is significant that Saint-Évremond describes himself not as libertine but as a philosopher writing on various subjects in different genres, with a preference for the shorter forms: chronicles, essays, poems, and letters addressed to friends.

In one of his essays, entitled “L’Homme qui veut connaître toutes choses ne se connaît pas lui-même” [The man who wants to know everything does not know himself], written in 1647–1648, he starts by warning the imaginary addressee, “the man who wants to know everything,” that he risks losing his sociability in his search for certain or total knowledge (Saint-Évremond 2004, 651). The essay expresses a typical libertine stance that accepts the limits of human reason but underlines the importance of cultivating one’s relations to others. Inspired by Montaigne’s scepticism and by philosopher Pierre Gassendi (1592–1655), who had introduced him to the atomistic theories of Epicurus, Saint-Évremond defends a lifestyle based on an art that French court society called *honnêteté*. It is a complex notion, difficult to translate, but it is based on the “court rationality” that Norbert Elias (2006, 120) describes as follows: “What we reify as ‘reason’ comes into being whenever adaptation to a particular society and survival within it demand a specific foresight or calculation and therefore a constraint of short-term individual affects.” On the one hand *honnêteté* designates a utilitarian use of social and verbal qualities in order to succeed at court and rise through the ranks of the nobility. On the other, the libertines could also adopt more subtle uses of the term, leaning on Montaigne whose *Essays* were regarded as “the breviary of *honnêtes gens*” (Stanton 1980, 21).

In Montaigne *honnêteté* is clearly linked to life as art, and in this sense it can also be connected to “a discourse of resistance to tyrannical domination” (Vance 2009, 80). In what follows I argue that Christina in her maxims demonstrates a

similar art at the same time that she is "essentially monarchic" (Thomas, in Christina 1996, 21). This type of sovereign subject was inspired by Stoic ideals and was strongly connected with exemplary heroism. Nevertheless, I will try to show that it is a combination of libertinism and sovereignty in connection with certain Christian values that characterizes Christina's art of existence, and that it is this contradictory complexity of subject positions that makes up, not her exemplary heroism, but her heroic exemplarity.

Furthermore, I argue that Christina's maxims and their specific subjective strategies ought to be read against the backdrop of French salon culture and the philosophical and literary discussions that developed there. In the margins of court society, cultural life was decentralized into the so-called salons of private homes (*hôtels particuliers*) where court rationality was turned into a more playful practice and an art of existence that made room for an attitude more critical than hypocritical.

Belonging to this mondain cultural elite, the libertines developed a discursive and cultural practice that treated their passions as a matter of style, focusing on manners and the art of conversation that was so praised by Montaigne: "Le plus fructueux et naturel exercice de nostre esprit, c'est à mon gré la conference. J'en trouve l'usage plus doux que d'aucune autre action de nostre vie" (The most fruitful and natural exercise of our mind, in my opinion is discussion. I find it sweeter than any other action of our life) (Montaigne 1979, 137; 2003, 855). Further, as Marc Schachter (2009, 124) has clarified, Montaigne's view of this art is revealing of a critical practice that Michel Foucault (1990, 38) identifies as "the art of not being so governed." As we will see, this art, developed in the freethinking tradition from Montaigne onward, is also a structuring, or more precisely, a destructuring principle in Christina's writing of her maxims.

Diverging Positions

Christina was thus not interested only in Neo-Stoical and Christian discussions of the kind of heroic virtue that presupposes a mastering faculty such as a sovereign human reason. Many of her maxims demonstrate instead a recognition of the limits of reason, as does the following: "La raison ne donne pas tout le secours qu'elle promet" (Reason affords not all assistance it promises) (Christina 1994, 152; 1753, 32). This critique of human reason as a sovereign faculty is not an abdicated queen's idiosyncratic expression but reveals that she is well versed in the period's central philosophical and literary discussions, which had at their core a freethinking tradition from Montaigne to La Rochefoucauld, whom Christine not only met

but also read (Engdahl 2019a, xx). Furthermore, this freethinking tradition's scepticism regarding the rational idea that a human being is the master of everything including her body is profoundly anti-cartesian, and opposes René Descartes' rather optimistic view of the passions.

In his treatise *Les Passions de l'âme* (*The Passions of the Soul*) (1649), Descartes (1996a, 133; 1988, 49) writes, "ceux même qui ont les plus faibles âmes pourraient acquérir un empire très absolu sur toutes leurs passions si on employait assez d'industrie à les dresser et à les conduire" (even those who have the weakest souls could acquire a quite absolute domination over all their passions if one employed enough skill in training and guiding them). Against such a rational idea Christina (1994, 199; 1753, 39) simply states: "L'on ne triomphe de ses passions, que lorsqu'elles sont faibles" (Passions are only triumphed over when they are weak). Needless to say, maxims of this kind are contradicted by others that express a more Stoic stance, such as: "Il faut aimer les plaisirs; il en faut jouir, mais il faut savoir s'en passer" (We should love pleasures, and enjoy them; but we should likewise bear to be without them) (Christina 1994, 151; 1753, 31). Or, more in accordance with a Christian moralist such as Blaise Pascal (1623–1662): "Le cœur humain est un abîme inconnu à lui-même; celui qui l'a fait en pénètre seul le fond" (The heart of man is an abyss unknown even to itself; he only, who made it, can fathom it) (Christina 1994, 227; 1753, 81). These contradictions or tensions between Stoic, Epicurean and Christian maxims have intrigued previous readers who have tried to define Christina's definitive standpoint. For instance, Swedish scholar Sven Stolpe (1959, 6) declares that it would be "absurd to assume that an intellectual woman of Christina's calibre could have at the same time adopted two opinions in contradiction of each other." Stolpe (1959, 16) also sets out to outline a logical movement in the queen's maxims, from an early interest in classical philosophy towards a spiritual solution to existential dilemmas reflecting her "convictions."

However, instead of trying to extract a definitive standpoint from Christina's maxims, I would like to relate the contradictory and fragmentary character of her maxims to the early modern practice of the short form, where the terms "maxim," "sentence" and "reflections" were not fixed. As the title of La Rochefoucauld's first edition of 1665, *Réflexions ou Sentences et Maximes morales* [Reflections or sentences and moral maxims], indicates, there was a slight confusion regarding the designation of this new and highly popular genre in Parisian salon culture. In addition, as Jean Lafond (1984, 105) points out, the practice of short-form writing, such as maxims and reflections in the French seventeenth century, departs from any idea of completion and invites active reading – a continuation of the art of conversation that framed the production of the genre in Parisian salon culture.

Christina read La Rochefoucauld with engagement, to judge from the many notes she wrote in the margins of the 1671 and 1678 editions that she had in her library (Engdahl 2019a, xxi). The genre seems to have had great appeal for her. Christina wrote more than 1,500 maxims in French, probably over a rather long period. She had her secretaries transcribe them around 1680 but they remain in an unfinished state with many additions and corrections by her hand. As Horace Engdahl (2019b, 301) notes in his translation of them into Swedish, they constitute a textual "morass" with no immediate order. Engdahl (2019a, xxii) also underlines that Christina's maxims are more "passionate and personal" than La Rochefoucauld's "objective and impersonal" ones. This impression seems to be shared by Jean-François Raymond (in Christina 1994, 61), who has edited the French original under the title *Apologies*, when he argues that they express her personality and that she disapproved of French salon culture.[2] Needless to say, the circumstances of writing differ between maxims probably written in solitude by Christina and La Rochefoucauld's enterprise that started at Madeleine de Sablé's (1559–1678) salon at the Place Royale. The latter wrote his maxims in order to perform them in front of his audience whereas Christina wrote hers in a freer setting without having a public in view. And indeed, she notes at the end of *L'Ouvrage de loisir*: "Cet ouvrage est de qui ne désir, ni ne craint rien, et qui n'impose aussi rien à personne" (This is the work of one, who desires nothing of, fears nothing from, and imposes nothing on, any mortal) (Christina 1994, 302; 1753, 151). However, this remark does not prevent Christina from taking part in the cultural practice whereby maxims emerged through reading and writing, as her many maxims on reading demonstrate. To give just one example that connects to *honnêteté*: "La lecture est une partie du devoir de l'honnête homme" (Reading is part of a good man's duty) (Christina 1994, 164; 1753, 41).

Furthermore, reading Christina's maxims as "personal" risks reducing them to her biography whereas La Rochefoucauld's maxims keep being assessed in their cultural context. Instead of taking for granted that Christina's writing is personal while La Rochefoucauld's is objective, I would like to point out some differences between them that have more to do with their diverging positions in the humanist analysis to which the maxims contributed.

2 Raymond's choice of title, *Apologies* (the plural form of apologue), also seems to indicate that he wants to distance Christina's writing from the cultural practice of maxims in Parisian salon culture.

A Cultural Practice

It is well known that Christina invited several prominent humanists and philosophers to her court in Stockholm in the years before her abdication. Her invitation to Descartes and his death in Stockholm in 1650 has become a legend, and her correspondence with and interest in the philosopher is also well documented (Raymond 1993). Some of Christina's maxims on the passions are probably inspired by Descartes' Neo-Stoic idea that reason and free will can be used to master the body and its feelings, as described in the treatise on the passions that he wrote just before arriving in Stockholm in 1649. He had also sent the queen an earlier version of the manuscript in 1647. In November of the same year, Descartes wrote her the famous letter regarding the nature of the sovereign good:

> Outre que le libre arbitre est de soi la chose la plus noble qui puisse être en nous, d'autant qu'il nous rend en quelque façon pareils à Dieu et semble nous exempter de lui être sujet, et que, par conséquent, son bon usage est le plus grand de tous nos biens, il est aussi celui qui est le plus proprement nôtre et qui nous importe le plus, d'où il suit que ce n'est que de lui que nos plus grands contentements peuvent procéder. (Descartes 1996b, 86)

> Now free will is intrinsically the noblest thing we can have, since it makes us in a way equal to God and seems to exempt us from being his subjects; and so its correct use is the greatest of all the goods we possess; indeed there is nothing that is more our own or that matters more to us. From all this it follows that nothing but free will can produce our greatest happiness. (Descartes 1991, 326)

However, in her maxims Christina also criticized the Neo-Stoic view of free will as the sovereign good that endows humans with the capacity to elevate themselves to divine heights. It is a fact that she also underlines the weakness of reason and the abyss of the heart that only God can penetrate. Against the claim that her maxims are a "confirmation of the depth and intensity of the spiritual and philosophical meeting between the queen and the philosopher" (Raymond 1993, 153), it could be argued that Christina, more in line with the moralists and libertines, explored the force of the passions in her development of an art of existence.

In any case, Christina also invited to her court thinkers who in several ways opposed Descartes' rationalist views on the passions, such as freethinkers or *libertins érudits* Pierre-Michon Bourdelot and Gabriel Naudé (Pintard 1943, 389). By hosting these intellectuals, she created a discursive space for reading and writing that was open to debate and contradictory views of human conduct. Christina was fully aware of essential aspects of the complex movement that has been associated with libertinism, especially the intellectual vein inspired by Epicureanism and Stoicism. In her library she had the writings of Gassendi on Epicurus as well as the French translation of the Latin hexameter poem *De rerum natura* (*On the*

Nature of Things) by the Epicurean Lucretius (Åkerman 2013, 229). Her maxims on pleasure and the acceptance of the force of the passions, which implies a critique of Neo-Stoicism and rationality, could have been inspired by her exchanges with Bourdelot and Naudé, who also took part in the discussions of the Parisian salons and freethinking academies.[3]

As described by French diplomat Pierre Chanut in a letter quoted by Raymond (1993, 46), the queen was interested in "des questions problématiques, particulièrement parmi des personnes savantes qui ont des sentiments différents" [problematic questions, in particular among learned people with different views]. In the same letter, Chanut describes in rather pejorative terms the young queen's attitude towards these learned people's discussions: "il est vrai qu'elle penche un peu vers l'humeur soupçonneuse et que parfois elle est un peu trop lente à s'éclaircir de la vérité, et trop facile à présumer de la finesse en autrui" [it is true that her mind is inclined to take on a suspicious mood and that she is sometimes slow in discovering the truth, and too easily presupposes others to be cunning] (Raymond 1993, 46). However, this hesitation in taking others' discourse as truth could also reflect an anti-dogmatic and sceptical mind. It is interesting to note that Christina herself, in the margin of Chanut's letter, wrote the following line: "Elle ne s'est jamais repentie de ce défaut" [She has never regretted this defect] (Raymond 1993, 46).

In point of fact, Christina also articulates this "defect" in her maxims: "Dire souvent: je ne sais, ne fait honte à personne" (To say often I know not, affronts nobody) (Christina 1994, 228; 1753, 82). This attitude can be related to the practice of scepticism typical of a Montaigne essay, which "sustains the open-endedness of the essayistic process and does not transform itself into dogmatism" (Zalloua 2009, 9), a practice that was continued in the freethinking tradition after him by French moralists such as La Rochefoucauld. As has been noted already, the moralists' analyses of human conduct and recognition of the elusive quality of experience cannot be separated from their style of writing, which tended to the fragmentary and unfinished.

Furthermore, the writing of short forms in the seventeenth century – essays, maxims, reflections and sentences – shaped by the art of conversation that was cultivated in mondain circles and literary salons, could be conceived also as a strategy to handle the subject formations imposed by court society, which forced everyone to hide behind a mask, representing oneself according to others' expect-

3 Gabriel Naudé was a member of the famous freethinking academy of the brothers Dupuy and Pierre-Michon Bourdelot was probably the facilitator of the circle that carries his name "académie Bourdelot" (Mazauric 1997).

ations. In this perspective the cultural practice developed by the moralist and libertine could be seen as a form of play disclosing what is hidden behind the mask. As La Rochefoucauld's famous epigraph to his maxims reads (1976, 43; 2008, 2): "Nos vertus ne sont, le plus souvent, que des vices déguisés" (Our virtues are most frequently but vices in disguise).

In this context, Dominique Maingueneau (1993, 32–33) has suggested that the salon spaces were "paratopic" in the sense that they permitted a certain liberty to scrutinize the conduct and manners dictated by the reign of Louis XIV. Thus, the use of the short form as such could be seen as subversive or at least as an instrument for humanist analysis that transforms its apparent objective stance into critical writing (Lafond 1984, 113–114). Christina herself wrote maxims that disclose the formation of subjectivity in court society in terms of "a specific foresight or calculation and therefore a constraint of short-term individual affects" (Elias 2006, 120). A maxim that points to this imposed self-control is the following: "L'art de pénétrer les hommes est rare; mais ceux qui l'ont sont faits pour régner" (The art of penetrating men is rare; but they who possess it, are made for reigning) (Christina 1994, 165; 1753, 42). It has been said that Christina was a "skillful politician" (Aurelius 1997, 36), and maxims of this sort can be read as part of her experience of governing that confirm this art as an instrument of power. At the same time there are other maxims that in line with the moralists scrutinize this same art within a more general dissection of the "anatomie de tous les replies de cœur" [anatomy of all the folds in the heart], as La Rochefoucauld (1976, 270) describes his enterprise.

There is a link here to the examination of conscience in Christianity. If the radicality of La Rochefoucauld's maxims consists in pushing this examination to its extreme in a kind of "infinite demystification" that in the final analysis discloses the lack of divine foundation in the human heart (Barthes 2005, 85), Christina reinstates God. She shares this valorization of faith as a last resort for human existence with another classical moralist, Pascal, but also with celebrated *salonnières* such as Marguerite de La Sablière (1624–1679) and Madeleine de Sablé. Thus, to the disclosure of the existential abyss in La Rochefoucauld's maxims, Christina (1994, 282 and 307) responds through her Christian maxims in the part of the manuscript called *Les sentiments héroïques*: "Tout ce qu'on peut faire sans Dieu, c'est de se perdre" [The only thing one can do without God is to get lost], and, "Le néant et le péché sont le partage de l'homme, tout le reste est de Dieu. La gloire lui en soit donnée dans le temps et dans l'éternité" [Nothingness and sin are the fate of man, the rest is in God's hands. The glory is his forever and ever].[4]

4 There is no extant translation of this part of Christina's maxims.

Thus, the pessimism that sometimes turns into cynicism in La Rochefoucauld's maxims is counteracted by Christian faith in Christina's writing, often in the form of a mystical communion with God.

As pointed out by Engdahl (2019a, xxvi), Christina could have been inspired by Catholic Bishop Francis de Sales' theological work *Traité de l'amour de Dieu* (*Treatise on the Love of God*) (1615), when she, in *Les sentiments héroïques*, describes the communion with God in the following terms: "La véritable sainteté consiste uniquement en ce qui se passe sans témoins entre Dieu et l'âme. Cet amoureux commerce n'admet pas un tiers" [The only true saintliness consists in a confidential communication between God and the soul. This amorous relationship does not admit a third party] (Christina 1994, 276). If God is the last resort that saves one from the abyss of nothingness which lies behind the masks when they are torn away by the maxim's unforgiving critical analysis in French salon culture, there is nevertheless also another path in Christina's maxims that bypasses La Rochefoucauld's pessimism. Or to put it differently, if existential nothingness is what threatens behind the masks that La Rochefoucauld wants to tear away, it may be that the very indetermination that defies a definitive standpoint in Christina's maxims is an answer in itself – an answer deriving from an "I know not," or a practice of scepticism that is also an art of existence.

When Christina after her abdication began writing her maxims, she was perhaps freer to develop her critique of human conduct than the mondain aristocrats – libertines and moralists – in the Parisian salons, but she continued through her writing their search for an "art of existence" that makes of one's life "an *oeuvre* that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria" (Foucault 1985, 10–11). This art, which Foucault explored in the Greco-Roman culture of self-care, returns in the sixteenth century and it can be detected as a main theme in Montaigne's essays (Zalloua 2005). In his wake, salon culture continued to develop its practice, and it seems plausible that Christina embraced this freethinking tradition when she wrote a maxim such as this: "Savoir bien vivre et bien mourir, c'est la science des science" (To live well and dye well, is the science of sciences) (Christina 1994, 154; 1753, 33). I would like to suggest that it is within the frame of this "science" that Christina displays various positions, from the Stoic and rational ideal of self-mastery to Christian humility and more Epicurean versions, such as this maxim on the passions: "Les passions sont le sel de la vie, qui est insipide sans elles" (The passions are the salt of life; which without them would be insipid) (Christina 1994, 194; 1753, 57), or more radically, "Il importe plus de jouir que de connaître" (To enjoy is of greater importance than to know) (Christina 1994, 274; 1753, 121). Although Christina didn't subscribe to a materialist view of human nature, she did obviously participate in the cultural context where Epicurean doctrines were discussed. It is significant that before her abdication she had tried to

invite Gassendi to her court in Stockholm. Unlike Descartes, the humanist Gassendi, in the same vein as Montaigne, "maintained that nothing could be known" (Wilson 2008, 25), which also can explain why the Epicurean message that pleasure was a higher good and not a sin is echoed in Christina's maxim.

As has been stated, by "the beginning of the seventeenth century, Epicurean circles flourished in France" (Wilson 2008, 19), and discussion of the art of existence was central to them. I argue that Christina's part in these discussions continues in her maxims. The fact that they express a Neo-Stoic and sovereign stance side by side with an expression of faith in God or Epicurean acknowledgement of the body and the force of the passions is not a sign of a confused mind. The contradictory, erratic and fragmentary character of Christina's writing is better seen as part of her approach to a specific cultural practice open to debate that I suggest is heroic in the sense of a strategy to gain and maintain a free subject position beyond a patriarchal social and cultural order. Let me develop this suggestion further by taking a closer look at the cultural and discursive space where this art and practice developed by focusing on the topic of love.

The Art of Not Being So Governed

Given that the short form is part of a cultural practice of writing and reading where different opinions and ideas could be tested and explored, this genre also makes it possible for Christina to articulate a freethinking subject position – i.e., essentially not position herself according to a specific doctrine stemming from a philosophical and literary tradition formed by masculine domination. Needless to say, this intellectual freedom was especially difficult to defend for a woman. As Erica Harth puts it, "feminine dissent was subject to much more (self)censorship than the masculine variety," and the formation of feminine subjectivity by "demands of modesty [. . .] kept even the most educated women well within the limits of orthodoxy" (1992, 62–63). However, if the salon was a *paratopic* place that in some cases accepted women's participation in the freethinking tradition, as Harth (1992, 62) also points to by referring to Ninon de Lenclos as "a celebrated exception to the ban on libertinage among salonnières," this orthodoxy could be transgressed.

In her memoirs, Françoise de Motteville relates that Ninon de Lenclos was the only woman whom Christina wanted to meet during her visit to Paris in 1656 (Åkerman 1991, 77). Describing this meeting in a letter to the young marquis de Sévigné, Ninon de Lenclos (1999, 38) tells her addressee that in her conversation with the Swedish queen she had described the *précieuses* – a leading group of

Parisian *salonnières* advocating a platonic view of love who articulated their ideal in terms of *tendre*, meaning that this passion should be sublimated into tenderness and hence not be fulfilled – as “les jansénistes de l’amour” [the Jansenists of love].[5]

The religious movement of Jansenism, which attracted not only writers such as Jean Racine and Pascal but also a large part of the mondain elite and especially Madeleine de Sablé’s salon (Conley 2002, 29), is characterized by a deep misanthropic ideology that to a certain degree is based on the posthumous publication of *Augustinus* by the Dutch bishop Jansenius (1585–1638). His followers in France were opposed to the Jesuit School and they emphasized divine grace as the only salvation for what was presumed to be a corrupt humanity. Thus, the formulation of the *précieuses* as “Jansenists of love” could be read as a satirical description of the moral austerity of Jansenism transposed to the arena of love. In other words, it refers to a specific theory of love that advocates self-control, tenderness and friendship against vehement passions and sexually fulfilled desire.

However, among libertines this version of love is criticized as idealistic and in another of the letters attributed to Ninon de Lenclos (1999, 38) she reveals her freethinking perspective, in line with Epicurean philosophy, stating that nature is the true force of love: “La nature veille toujours, toujours elle tend à sa fin. Le besoin d’aimer fait dans une femme une partie d’elle-même: sa vertu n’est qu’une pièce de rapport” [Nature is always watchful, always aiming at her end. The need for love is, in a woman, a part of herself: her virtue is nothing but a piece of patchwork]. In any event, the very label “Jansenists of love” indicates a debate between an idealized or rational version of love on the one hand and, on the other, a more open attitude towards the force of the passions that does not condemn the body.

These divergent perspectives on love discussed in Parisian salon culture and its literature can be sensed in many of Christina’s maxims. As a refined version of a Stoic contempt for the body she can write a maxim that articulates a common argument among the *précieuses*: “Il est vrai que l’âme n’a point de sexe” (It is true that the soul is of no sex) (Christina 1994, 232; 1753, 86). And it could also be that this reflected an interest in the philosophy of Descartes that she shared with the *précieuses*. As Harth (1992, 3) puts it:

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5 The correspondence has been attributed to various writers and editors of the eighteenth century, such as the novelist Claude-Prosper Jolyot de Crébillon. Although the letters are not by Lenclos but constructed by an eighteenth-century writer, they articulate a libertine discourse. The designation “les jansénistes de l’amour” probably derives from Saint-Évremond (1969, 407) who in his poem “Le Cercle” (1656) satirizes preciosity, but it is supposed that he quoted Lenclos (Hope 1999, 141).

> A major source of Descartes's initial appeal was the apparent universality of his message that his rules and method for discovering truth could be used by anyone, of either sex. His dualist separation of mind and body strengthened the Augustinian concept of mind as a place "where there is no sex."

As a matter of fact, Christina was included among the *précieuses* in Antoine Baudeau de Somaize's *Dictionnaire des précieuses* of 1661. In the dictionary, Somaize refers to the Swedish queen by the alias Clorinde, a name that probably alludes to Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata* (*Jerusalem Delivered*) where Clorinde is a warrior woman, or a *femme forte*, in the idiom of the *précieuses* (Vergnes 2013). The description reads: "Clorinde visitera le conseil privé des auteurs, et y présidera. Madate luy fera une harangue au nom de la compagnie, et l'on disputera à l'ordinaire en sa présence, et cela dans l'année 1658" [Clorinde will visit the private council of authors, and she will preside over it. Madate will give her a harangue on behalf of the company, and they will discuss it as usual in her presence, and this in the year of 1658] (Baudeau de Somaize 1856, 189). In a note Somaize (1856, 189) also explicates the name: "Explication: Clorinde, Christine, reyne de Suede. – Le conseil privé des auteurs, l'Academie Françoise" [Explanation: Clorinde, Christine, queen of Sweden. – The private council of authors, the French Academy]. Furthermore, Christina corresponded with Madeleine de Scudéry (1607–1701), one of the movement's central figures, who also included her in one of her novels, *Artamène ou le Grand Cyrus* (1649–1653). It is highly plausible that several of her maxims on love and marriage stem from or at any rate are in accordance with the philosophy of love articulated in these circles, such as: "L'amour et l'hymen sont presque incompatibles" (Love and marriage are almost incompatible) (Christina 1994, 203; 1753, 64).

Various scholars, drawing on these maxims, maintain that Christina rejected sexuality or sensual pleasures (Aurelius 1997, 44; Engdahl 2019a, xv). However, the division between marriage and love has a long and, not least, aristocratic tradition, which in a sense culminates with the *précieuses* as a strategic move in order to create a space of liberty within a patriarchal order. The famous "Carte de Tendre" [Map of Tendre], that appeared in Scudéry's other novel, *Clélie, histoire romaine* (1654–1680), resumes the movement's idea of love as tender friendship, and indicates that anti-marriage ideas were not necessarily anti-sensualist. In her maxims, Christina subscribes to a certain degree to the sublimation of love into tenderness that characterizes this idea.

In addition, Christina's anti-marriage stance is obviously related to her position as sovereign queen refusing not sexuality but the "hetero-patriarchal obligation of marriage and reproduction," to quote Gary Ferguson (2019, 703), and it could probably also serve as a way to counteract the many denigrating pamphlets about her that circulated during the period that followed her abdication. Thus, on

the one hand, and in line with the movement of the *précieuses*, Christina's anti-marriage maxims reflect a resistance to a subject formation that controls women's bodies and desire. On the other hand, several of Christina's maxims on love seem closer to the libertines' critique of the hegemonic condemnation of the passions. In this perspective her maxims on the passions as the salt of life, and her underlining of the importance of learning how to live and die, which in accordance with moralist discourse she calls "the science of sciences," indicates a thinking that undermines a dualistic view on body and soul. It could also be that her maxims on love are more in compliance with this freethinking tradition than with the *précieuses*' doctrine of *tendre*, despite her maxim on the sexless soul.

Engdahl (2019a, xxii) has even suggested that Christina is "not 'French' in her view of love," but that she, against the "heartless" La Rochefoucauld, claims love "as life's essential force." Engdahl is here referring to maxims such as "Le véritable amour ne prétend rien que d'aimer" (True love pretends nothing but to love) (Christina 1994, 144; 1753, 27) and "L'amour subsiste toujours, qu'il soit heureux ou malheureux" (Love subsists always, whether happy or unhappy) (Christina 1994, 145; 1753, 27). However, read against the backdrop of the divergent perspectives on love that developed in French salon culture, these maxims could very well also be seen as participating in this polyphonic discourse. Besides, it is possible to connect Christina's underlining of the force of love in her maxims to the freethinking tradition that had Lucretius' philosophical poem, and especially his invocation to Venus, as one of its key texts. And Lucretius' poem, as Vesperini (2017, 260–265) has demonstrated, could be used in many ways. Or as Christina puts it: "On est tel que son amour" (Such as the love is, the man is) (Christina 1994, 145; 1753, 27).

Conclusion

Christina left many traces in French literature during her lifetime that are illuminating of the transgressions that marked her freethinking. For instance, in her memoir, Motteville wrote that the Swedish queen was "née libertine" [born libertine] (Cavaillé 2017, 397). To be sure, the libertine label applied to Christina by her contemporaries was used for defaming purposes (Aurelius 1997). As has been noted by a member of the French Academy, Henri Bordeaux (1927), "Peu de souveraines, peu de femmes ont été plus louées ensemble et plus vilipendées" [Very few sovereigns, very few women have been so praised and at the same time so defamed]. And of course, the contradictory images of Christina in contemporary historical and fictional works are revealing of her transgressions: the Swedish

queen refused to marry, she abdicated the throne in 1654 and converted to Catholicism later the same year. Overall, she refused to subjugate herself to the demands of modesty. However, instead of trying to extract a true image of Christina among these different opinions, I have tried to read her maxims as a space where different subjective positions can be elaborated. It is significant that her interest in religious matters as well as in the philosophy of Descartes is very well documented, while her freethinking is often reduced to a denigrating rumour. But if early modern freethinking, as Richard Scholar (2010, 9) says apropos of Montaigne, is an "anti-authoritarian cast of mind that he and his contemporaries could bring to bear on all kinds of questions," then Queen Christina's maxims can also be conceived as an expression of such a cast of mind. Furthermore, when it comes to the contradictions in Christina's use of the short form, I think it is important to remember that maxims, sentences and reflections during the seventeenth century were not fixed genres but were used in a cultural practice that with Foucault (1990, 38) could be seen as "the art of not being so governed."

Thus, I propose that Christina's heroism derives from a striving to find her own way through the period's dominating forms of subjectivation by an exploration of the short form as a cultural practice that invites an ongoing reading and an unfinished writing. In other words, the short form as it was practised by the libertines and moralists in Parisian salon culture can harbour the contradictions and plurality of perspectives that allowed Christina to *not* take a position in her maxims – a heroic strategy to avoid a general system of domination.

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Matilda Amundsen Bergström

Making Sense of Sorrow: Poetic Authority and the Bodily Experience of Grief in Hedvig Charlotta Nordenflycht's *The Grieving Turtle Dove*

Hedvig Charlotta Nordenflycht (1718–1763) is, arguably, the most successful female poet in the history of Swedish literature. Her twenty-year-long writing career coincided with an expansive phase in Swedish literary culture, during which both a book market and a bourgeois readership began to emerge (see Sahlin 1989). Nordenflycht made the most of the opportunities afforded by such developments. Between 1742 and 1763 she published hundreds of poems in all genres from occasional to philosophical. As sole female member, she led one of the country's first learned societies – *Tankebyggarna* [The Thought Builders]. In their joint publications, she contributed significantly to the introduction of continental enlightenment thought in Sweden (see Stålmarck 1986). From the early 1750s onwards, she lived comfortably on a state pension granted in recognition of her literary achievements (Stålmarck 1997, 136). As Nordenflycht's friend Gustaf Fredrik Gyllenborg put it in an eulogy of her, "Norden genljud gaf, hvar gång hon lyran slog" [The North resounded, each time she struck her lyre] (Creutz and Gyllenborg 1795, 246). Nordenflycht was a star, seemingly born for a life of literature and learning.

Yet of course, she was not. In a 1745 autobiographical letter written for publication, Nordenflycht describes a childhood oriented towards the typical goal for a genteel girl: marriage. And though she portrays herself as hopelessly inadequate in "de vanliga Kvinno-Slöjder" [the usual female chores] (Nordenflycht 1996, 4), Nordenflycht's life followed the customary course.[1] In 1741, she married the priest Jacob Fabricius and moved to a garrison town in southern Sweden.

But after just seven months, Fabricius died. Nordenflycht was no longer a wife – the rupture of death throwing her off a conventional life path. In the autobiographical letter, Nordenflycht describes two consequences of this sudden and unexpected shift. First, a grief so physically excruciating that she longed to die. And then, when she did not, poetic creation:

1 All translations of Nordenflycht's writings are mine.

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> Min sorg var obeskrivelig. Alla sinnen förstördes, och kroppen kastades i yttersta elände. Slag, dåningar, många tillstötande sjukdomar, nattvak och en tankestrid utan vila, voro dock icke mäktige att utsläcka ett liv, som var sig själv till odrägelig plåga [. . .]. Mina ögon vilade sällan, och min harpa spelade idel sorgekväden: av dem är en liten Samling på trycket utgången, under namn av Den Sörjande Turturduvan. (Nordenflycht 1996, 12)
>
> [My grief was indescribable. All senses were ruined, and the body was thrown into utmost misery. Palsy, swoons, many occurring illnesses, vigils, and incessantly warring thoughts, were however not powerful enough to extinguish a life, which was an insufferable torment to itself [. . .]. My eyes rarely rested, and my harp perpetually played songs of lament: of these a small Collection is printed, under the name The Grieving Turtle Dove.]

Den Sörgande Turtur-Dufwan [The Grieving Turtle Dove] was Nordenflycht's debut poetry collection, sent to the censor in 1742 together with her first print publication, the eulogy *Swenska Fruentimretz Klagan* [The Complaint of Swedish Woman], and printed in the early months of 1743.[2] It is a slender volume comprising only nine poems and a brief preface. But as many scholars have remarked, it is a big deal. Stina Hansson has argued that by bringing an aesthetic repertoire associated with popular devotional writing to bear on secular love, Nordenflycht develops an innovative love poetics resembling the sentimental lyricism emerging in Europe at the time (Hansson 1991, 12–38). Relatedly, Otto Fischer has highlighted how Nordenflycht's prefatorial fiction – in which *The Grieving Turtle Dove* is presented as songs collected by a fictive editor and sent to a devoted friend – resembles those of yet-unpublished sentimental classics like Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Julie* (1761) and J. W. von Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* (1774) (Fischer 2004, 125). Helene Blomqvist, lastly, has demonstrated that in *The Grieving Turtle Dove*, Nordenflycht broaches the controversial theological issue of theodicy – an unusual endeavour in a Sweden still shaped by Lutheran orthodoxy (Blomqvist 2016, 118).

However, *The Grieving Turtle Dove* breaks new ground in yet another way. This is not just Nordenflycht's debut poetry collection, but the first collection of original poetry published by a woman in Sweden. As a Swedish female poet in print, Nordenflycht was preceded only by Sophia Elisabet Brenner (1659–1730).[3] But Brenner's two volumes of *Poetiske Dikter* (Poetic Verse, 1713, 1732) were pub-

2 Prior to these publications, Nordenflycht produced a few printed occasional poems and a manuscript collection of poetry. But as Torkel Stålmarck has argued, these only reached a limited readership and cannot be considered as published in a strict sense (1997, 46).

3 As Hilma Borelius has pointed out, Nordenflycht's title *The Grieving Turtle Dove* might allude to Brenner. In a eulogy for her husband, Brenner writes: "Ja, fast du dig till döds envettigt ville grufva / Det vor' en loflig sorg dock för en turturdufva" [Yes, though you would worry yourself to death / It would however be a lawful sorrow for a turtle dove] (Nordenflycht 1938, 350).

lished late in the poet's life or posthumously and comprised previously circulated occasional poetry. Nordenflycht was the first woman in Sweden to embark on a literary career by means of a printed collection of poetry. To succeed (as indeed it did), such an unprecedented enterprise needed to be explained and justified to a Swedish readership as unfamiliar with native women poets as they were familiar with a Lutheran ideal of femininity centred around silence, modesty and domestic life (see Öhrberg 2001, 37–47).

In this chapter, I will argue that *The Grieving Turtle Dove* provides such justification by recounting what might be described as Nordenflycht's poetic origin story. Taking my cue from the above-quoted autobiographical letter I will explore how, in this story, the sensory experience of grief serves as a source of poetic authority. Such a reading requires a caveat. *The Grieving Turtle Dove* was published anonymously. Nonetheless, like other scholars I believe that Nordenflycht intended readers to interpret the unnamed, mourning female poetic speaker as herself – an interpretation which both the above-quoted letter and the preface suggest (Stålmarck 1997, 47; Fischer 2004, 119). I will therefore, on occasion, refer to this poetic speaker as Nordenflycht. This does not mean that I return to an older view within scholarship of *The Grieving Turtle Dove* as versified journal notes, unfolding the true feelings of a historical person (see for example Kruse 1895, 89–96). Rather, I suggest that Nordenflycht presents a carefully constructed image of herself as poet against the backdrop of her own biography. Central to that image is her husband's death – an event that brings about what might best be described as an eighteenth-century *queer moment*.

Chronicling a Queer Moment

In her 2004 book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed discusses heteronormativity in terms of direction. Heteronormativity, Ahmed argues, serves to open certain life paths while barring others, pressing bodies to move in certain ways and allowing them to extend into certain spaces. Conversely, to breach norms might be seen as a (voluntary or accidental) change of direction – branching out from a conventional life course onto another type of path. Ahmed calls such an instance of re-direction a *queer moment*, when "the failure to reproduce norms as forms of life is embraced or affirmed as a political and ethical alternative" (Ahmed 2004, 146). *The Grieving Turtle Dove*, I will argue, chronicles such a queer moment. Within the space of it, Nordenflycht – thrown off course by a beloved husband's death – comes to embrace the "failure to reproduce norms as forms of life" that widowhood entails. Furthermore, she uses it to springboard

her towards a life that was most certainly queer in eighteenth-century Sweden: the single life of writing.[4]

The Grieving Turtle Dove forms a clear narrative, over the course of which the poetic speaker struggles through grief and despair to finally reach acquiescence and what she calls a "lefnads beslut" [life resolution]. Fischer, and many others, have emphasized the spiritual aspect of this process, arguing that *The Grieving Turtle Dove* opens with religious doubt and ends with faith being regained (Fischer 2004, 124; see also Olsson 1999, 156–157; Blomqvist 2016, 111–112). True as this may be, I would like to suggest an alternative reading of the book's narrative arc. In addition to recording a spiritual journey, *The Grieving Turtle Dove* chronicles the speaker's queer re-orientation – from a life as wife to one as poet.

In the first stanzas of the volume's opening poem, Nordenflycht portrays a struggle which encompasses more than arduous feelings. Here, the speaker's well-being is threatened not only by grief but by an imperative to remain silent in the face of all-consuming emotional pain:

> Jag strider med mig sjelf, at dämpa ned den smärta,
> Som bor fördold; men har sit wälde i mit hjerta,
> Der hon med dubbla skott mit öma sinne skär,
> Och i en stadig fart, så hemligt mig förtär.
>
> Men som jag i mig sjelf dess wälde ej kan dämpa,
> Hwi skal jag då uti en ewig tysthet kämpa?
> En sådan tysthet är en Olja på min brand:
> Min plåga får der af mer magt och öfwerhand.
>
> Den tiden är sin kos, de stunder platt förstörda,
> På hwilken jag försökt, at lätta af min börda
> I trogna wännens sköt, som lindrade mit qwal;
> Men är nu döf och tyst, til alt mit sorge tal.
>
> Ty må jag för mig sjelf utgjuta mina tårar,
> Och repa ynkligt up den smärta, som mig sårar:
> Det är så sorgens art, at finna ro och lust
> Uti sit egit djup, i klagan, gråt och pust.
>
> (Nordenflycht 1743, 5)

4 I use the term "queer" in the most basic meaning given by Ahmed, who in *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* describes queer lives as "maintain[ing] a discomfort with the scripts of heteronormative existence," rather than as a term that specifically denotes homoeroticism (Ahmed 2004, 151).

[I struggle with myself, to moderate the pain
That secretly resides in but reigns over my heart,
Where she, with double shots, wounds my aching sense
And at a steady pace, consumes me secretly.[5]

But as I in myself cannot suppress its reign,
Why shall I struggle then in an eternal silence?
Such silence is an oil upon my fire laid
My torment gains thereof more force and upper hand.

The time has passed, the period wholly ruined,
In which I tried to lighten my load
Into the bosom of a faithful friend, who eased my anguish
But who now is deaf and dumb, to all my speech of grief.

So may I for myself shed my tears,
And sorrily unravel the pain that hurts me so:
It is the nature of grief, to find solace and bliss
In its own depths, in complaining, weeping, sighing.]

Later in the poem, the speaker links the "pain that hurts me so" to her grief over her husband's death. But arguably, we might also connect this pain to the loss of heteronormative existence, interpreting the poetic speaker's pain as an example of the profound "discomfort" which Ahmed associates with moving away from normativity – as an emotional response to that first, difficult step before the "failure to reproduce norms" can be embraced and its potential explored (Ahmed 2004, 152–154). When grieving her lost beloved, the speaker might also be said to grieve her lost way of life. In these first stanzas Nordenflycht thus introduces two interconnected themes: queer re-direction and acute emotional suffering. The queer moment may, as Ahmed writes, be all about affirmation. But for Nordenflycht at least, it originates in loss and pain.

In the second of the above-quoted stanzas, Nordenflycht questions a perceived expectation to remain silent about her emotional suffering, calling silence

5 The meaning of the Swedish word *skott* in this stanza is ambiguous and could mean both "shoot" and "shot." In her edition of the poem, Hilma Borelius writes that the phrase "dubbla skott" might (but does not necessarily) refer to two shots from a gun (Nordenflycht 1938, 388). In his edition of the poem, Torkel Stålmarck does not comment on the meaning of *skott* but contends that the Swedish word *skär* in the same line should be understood in a broader sense as "wounds" (*sårar*, *plågar*) rather than specifically as "cuts" (Nordenfycht 1996, 360). I follow Borelius' and Stålmarck's interpretations here, wherefore I also opt to translate *öm* as "aching," rather than my usual translation of *öm* as "tender."

"an oil on my fire laid."[6] In the third stanza, she discards friendship as an equally inadequate therapy.[7] God is not even considered as a source of comfort in this opening passage. Only one thing can bring the speaker "solace": expression. Or, as she puts it in the fourth stanza, "complaining," "weeping," "sighing" and attempting to "sorrily unravel the pain" – implicitly in the form of the songs of complaint the reader has before her eyes. The struggle, and the way through it, seems to be poetic as much as religious.

Linking lost love to literary creation was standard fare in the early modern lyric, not least within the Petrarchan tradition. Nordenflycht's rejection of silence is nonetheless evocative. Most obviously, silence was an archetypical Lutheran wifely virtue (Stadin 1997, 209–210). In claiming it to be unfitting for her, Nordenflycht accentuates her new status as no-longer wife. She also implies that grief forces her to depart from what some might consider a woman's virtuous path. It is not only the loss of her husband that forces her life to take a queer turn. It is also her emotional, and poetic, response to that loss.

Moreover, silence – the restraint of external expression of grief – was a significant feature of protestant (as opposed to Catholic) mourning. The dismissal of purgatory and the doctrine of divine providence left little space for zealous mourning within protestant approaches to death (Koslofsky 1998, 82–89; Marshall 2002, 93–123). In poem IV, Nordenflycht describes the poetic speaker's struggle with these Lutheran conventions. In the poem, she exhorts herself to calmly accept her fate:

> Werdslig ro far wäl,
> Kom min öma Siäl!
> Blif nu hård och kall,
> Mot alt olycks fall,
> Sätt dig för,
> Som sig bör,
> Att anse
> Wäl och we,
> Lika nögd [. . .]
> (Nordenflycht 1743, 13)

6 As Blomqvist notes, this may allude to Psalm 32 in the Book of Psalms, where we read "When I kept silent [about my sin] / my bones wasted away / through my groaning all day long" (Blomqvist 2016, 110). If so, this is an excellent example of how Nordenflycht makes use of devotional literature when writing about secular love.

7 Fischer explores this communicative breakdown in depth, describing it as yet another innovative aspect of *The Grieving Turtle Dove* (2004, 116–117).

[Earthly peace farewell,
Come, my tender soul!
Grow now hard and cold,
In the face of all misfortune,
Resolve,
As is appropriate,
To consider
Well and woe,
Equally acceptable [. . .]]

Here the speaker urges herself to accept, “as is appropriate,” both fortune and misfortune as incomprehensible but blameless instances of divine providence. Yet, in *The Grieving Turtle Dove* every such resolution proves unsuccessful in the face of excruciating emotional suffering. Furthermore, Nordenflycht’s pain makes her question how valid such conventions are, asking rhetorically in the opening poem “as I in myself cannot suppress its [pain’s] reign, / Why shall I then struggle in eternal silence?” Grief leads her to search for new political and ethical alternatives.

The first stanzas of *The Grieving Turtle Dove* thus introduce another story alongside the spiritual one, depicting a widow whose grief brings her to reject an imperative to remain silent in favour of a “political and ethical alternative” centred around expression. This is the story of the queer moment. The ensuing seven poems of *The Grieving Turtle Dove* enact the search for such an alternative, as Nordenflycht explores an – in the Swedish context – unconventional mode of writing about secular love and loss. I will address aspects of this mode below. But first, I turn to the book’s final poem where the narrative is brought to a close under the title “Lefnads Beslut” [Life Resolution]. There, Nordenflycht writes:

I Denna enslighet, har jag min boning walt,
I detta tysta lugn, jag werdsens storm betraktar
All höghet prakt och lust, som lyckan bjuder falt,
Jag som en flyktig rök, en wäder bubla agtar,
Här skall jag lära mig at draga tidens ok
I tålamod och hopp, tils frihets stunden nalkas,
Tils döden löser af mit swåra ängslans dok
Och all min sorge-eld i säker hwilo swalkas.
Imedlertid jag här min forna lust beser,
Det ljufwa Paradis, som lik en ros förbleknat,
Och trogna tårar til dens dyra minne ger,
Hwars kärlek, wett och dygd jag i min själ upptecknat.
Här skal jag repa upp min Herdes ljufwa namn,
Här skola klippor på min sorge toner swara,
Här skall jag göra mig bekanter om den hamn,
Der rena själar få i ewig kärlek wara.
(Nordenflycht 1743, 21–22)

[In this solitude, I have chosen my abode,
In this calm tranquillity, I observe the stormy world
All hauteur, pomp, and lust that fortune tries to hawk
I regard as fleeting smoke, a mere bubble of air,
Here I will learn to bear the yoke of time
In patience and in hope, until deliverance comes,
Until death releases my veil of severe disquiet
And all my grief-fire is cooled in assured rest.
Meanwhile I here look on my former joy
The lovely paradise, withered like a rose,
And offer faithful tears to the precious memory
Of one whose love, sense and virtue are recorded in my soul.
Here I shall repeat my shepherd's sweet name,
Here rocks will echo my tunes of grief,
Here I will familiarize myself with the harbour
Where pure souls may live in eternal love.]

Nordenflycht's struggle is finally resolved. The speaker accepts her husband's death and decides to go on living "in patience and in hope." Significantly, she also decides to regulate her life in a specific way.

Fischer and Blomqvist have underscored the religious dimension of Nordenflycht's "life resolution," with Fischer even calling *The Grieving Turtle Dove* a "frälsningsdrama" [salvation narrative] (2004, 124). But important as religion is in this final poem, Nordenflycht resolves to do more than "familiarize myself with the harbour / where pure souls may live in eternal love." Forever faithful to her departed "shepherd" (a nod to popular bucolic poetry on which she often builds (Olsson 1999, 150)), Nordenflycht also resolves to live alone in "solitude" – i.e., to remain on the sidelines of heteronormative life as a widow. Additionally, she determines to spend her days playing "sorge toner" [tunes of grief]. This expression is both a more explicitly lyrical continuation of the "complaining," "weeping" and "sighing" of poem I and a reference to the volume's title page, where Nordenflycht's poems are presented as "bedröfweliga sånger" [miserable songs].[8] Moreover, the lines mirror another passage in poem I where Nordenflycht, lamenting the loss of her beloved, exclaims "Jag hör ej flera råd af dina läppar flyta, / Ditt rena sannings ord min oros stormar bryta" [I hear no more advice flow from your lips, / Your pure words of truth that stop my worry-storms] (Nordenflycht 1743, 8). Having begun *The Grieving Turtle Dove* by rejecting silence and grieving

8 The full title of the volume is *Den Sörgande Turtur-Dufwan, Eller Åtskilliga bedröfweliga Sånger, Under Wackra Melodier sammansatte Och Samlade af en Medlidande Åhörare* [The Grieving Turtle Dove, or Several Miserable Songs, Put Together with Beautiful Melodies and Collected by a Sympathetic Listener].

the loss of her husband's words, she ends it having found her own. Having begun with the pain of being pushed off a heteronormative life path, she ends up embracing a "political and ethical alternative", the single life of writing. The narrative has brought both Nordenflycht and her reader through the queer moment and to the creation of the volume at hand.

In chronicling a queer moment of re-direction, *The Grieving Turtle Dove* provides Nordenflycht with a poetic origin story. In reality, Nordenflycht had written poetry both before and after marrying. But to present her poetic endeavour as if it were a direct consequence of her husband's death arguably made it easier to harmonize with conventional femininity – not least because the grieving widow, often called a "turtle dove", was a familiar devotional, literary trope (Hansson 1991, 22). Nevertheless, for eighteenth-century readers Nordenflycht's account of her poetic origins reasonably sparked new questions. Nordenflycht was certainly not the first young woman in Sweden to become a widow and mourn a beloved husband. But she was the first to emerge from the experience a poet. In addition, as Fischer has argued, Nordenflycht's expressive poetics drastically break with the dominant classical, rhetorical tradition (Fischer 2004, 120, 125). How could the experience of grief justify the exceptional – and potentially unvirtuous – choice to relate this experience in print? How could it serve as a source of poetic authority?

Poetic Authority and the Experience of Grief

I noted above that Nordenflycht opens *The Grieving Turtle Dove* with linking grief to a need for expression. In the ensuing stanza of poem I, she develops this link into the following comment on poetics:

> Här [hur?] skal jag brista ut, hwar äro ord at finna?[9]
> Hur kan dock tungans ljud mit hjertas mening hinna?
> Så häftigt sorgeswall, så plågsamt tanke lop
> Kan ej af toma ord få lugn, och ränsas op.
> (Nordenflycht 1743, 5)

> [Here [how?] shall I burst out, where are words to be found?
> How can the sounds made by a tongue approach my heart's meaning?
> Such a violent grief-gush, such a painful thought-race
> Cannot by empty words be calmed or ordered up.]

9 In the 1743 edition of *The Grieving Turtle Dove*, the first word of this line is "här" (here). However, in his critical edition of Nordenflycht's poetry Stålmarck concludes that this is most likely a printing error and argues that the correct word is "hur" (how) (Nordenflycht 1996, 360).

Here, Nordenflycht moves from "complaining," "weeping" and "sighing" to seeking to "burst out" – implicitly in song. She also develops her approach to lyric expression. Not only does the speaker refuse to remain silent, she also rejects any form of speech distinguished by "empty words" – plausibly a reference to the above-mentioned classical, rhetorical tradition (Fischer 2004, 120; Engdahl 2016, 37). Instead, she favours a style of writing that might, as she puts it, "approach my heart's meaning."

In promoting an emotionally authentic form of expression, Nordenflycht seems to advance the sentimental poetics that were coming into fashion in Europe at the time (cf. Fischer 2004, 121). In the wider European context, many scholars have related this popularization of sentimental literature to a contemporaneously growing acceptance of women writers, generally considered naturally adept at the seemingly authentic, "unlearned" and emotional sentimental style (Pinch 1996, 57; Barker-Benfield 1992, xvi–xix). When Nordenflycht published *The Grieving Turtle Dove* many seminal sentimental texts were yet unwritten. But the idea that women wrote in an emotionally authentic style cropped up in many contexts.[10] In Sweden for example, similar notions developed within the popular pietist and Moravian movements – protestant branches that emphasized an intensely emotional relationship with God. There, they seem to have enabled the emergence of female devotional lyricists in the 1740s (Öhrberg 2003, 123). In claiming to aspire to emotional authenticity rather than stylistic mastery (a mastery which many other poems show her to possess), Nordenflycht thus exploits conventional views of women to justify her unconventional endeavour.

Moreover, Nordenflycht's dismissal of "empty words" in favour of heartfelt expression serves as a meta-poetic comment explaining her ground-breaking way of writing about love and loss. From that perspective, it is noteworthy that the comment is prompted by grief's sensory aspect. In the above-quoted stanza grief constitutes a "violent gush" that hits Nordenflycht, while her thoughts are described as racing wildly. Both metaphors allude to grief as a sensory experience impressing on the body from without and within. The poet must express her grief, it seems, because grief manifests itself at the level of the body as sensory pain. As in Ahmed's discussion of queer pleasure in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, the body and senses take centre stage in Nordenflycht's grief and in her ensuing process of queer re-direction. In fact, throughout *The Grieving Turtle Dove*

10 As one example, Nicolas Malebranche writes in his 1674–1675 *De la recherche de la verité* that though women are "incapable of penetrating to truths that are slightly difficult to discover," they have a "great understanding of everything that strikes the senses" (Malebranche 1997, 130).

Nordenflycht offers no other justification for her breach of convention than the excruciatingly painful experience of grief.

Nordenflycht highlights the sensory nature of grief throughout *The Grieving Turtle Dove* in two distinct but related ways. The first is to use metaphors to give emotions physical form. One striking example of this literary strategy is poem III, where Nordenflycht describes grief as torture for the heart. The poem is called "Alla nymfers prinsessinna" [The princess of all nymphs], a title borrowed from an idyllic love poem by Jacob Frese (1690–1729). In Nordenflycht's version however, love is anything but idyllic. She writes:

> Arma hjerta, kan du tänka
> Och dig sänka
> På din djupa olycks grund,
> Utan at i stycker brista,
> Och så mista
> Känslan af din plågo stund?
>
> Ja, du måste, fast du bäfwar
> Och motsträfwar,
> Mot din wilja hafwa lif,
> Wrida dig i böljor wåta,
> Och dig låta
> Sargas af en långsam knif
>
> Ingen undflygt är förhanden,
> sorgebranden
> Som dig utan uphör tär,
> Kan af hoppets fläckt ej lindras,
> eller hindras:
> Intet hopp mer öfrigt är.
> (Nordenflycht 1743, 9–10)
>
> [Wretched heart, can you think
> And dwell upon
> The source of your deep misfortune,
> Without breaking into pieces,
> And thus lose
> The sensation of your moment of torment?
>
> Yes, you must, though you shudder
> And resist,
> Against your will have life,
> Writhe in wet waves,
> And let yourself
> Be molested by a slow knife

> No escape is close at hand,
> The grief-fire
> That consumes you ceaselessly
> Cannot be soothed by the breeze of hope
> Nor stopped:
> There is no hope in anything.]

Metaphors that liken strong emotion to fire and the heart breaking are common both in early modern love lyrics – again, not least within the Petrarchan tradition – and in devotional writing, but Nordenflycht's imagery is unusually graphic. In an explanatory comment in his critical edition of Nordenflycht's verse, Stålmarck especially highlights the image of the heart that "writhe[s] in the wet waves" as being "oklar" [unclear] (Nordenflycht 1996, 361). In passages such as these Nordenflycht gives emotional suffering poignant physical form, as "känslan" [the sensation] of grief is equated to the heart burning, drowning and being "molested by a slow knife." Moreover, in the third stanza Nordenflycht utilizes a language-specific option to form composite words, combining the words "sorg" [grief] and "brand" [fire] into the unusual word "sorgebranden" [grief-fire]. The technique powerfully emphasizes the sensory aspect of grief, as it enables Nordenflycht to claim that grief *is* fire rather than comparing the two phenomena. Tellingly, Nordenflycht returns to this technique throughout *The Grieving Turtle Dove*, crafting several words that combine "grief" with concrete nouns – such as "sorgeroten" [the grief-root], "sorgesvall" [grief-gush], "sorgeoljor" [grief-oils] and "sorgehav" [grief-sea].

Nordenflycht's second way of highlighting the sensory aspect of grief is to detail its physical symptoms. The most striking example is poem V, which depicts anxiety-induced insomnia. In the first two stanzas Nordenflycht writes:

> Så komma mina wakostunder,
> Du mörka långa nattetid.
> Har Solen åter gömt sig under,
> Att skänka alla ögon frid?
> [. . .]
>
> En tid den sjelf Naturen ämnat
> Til lisa för hwar ängslig trött,
> Har sorgen mig til fristad lämnat,
> På den min ängslan mest blir skött:
> De trötta ögon tynas av,
> De falla hop, men utan hwila;
> Ty bittra tanke-stormar ila
> Ifrån mit mörka sorge-hav.
> (Nordenflycht 1743, 14)

[So come my waking hours
You long, dark night
Has the Sun once more hid away
To give peace to every eye?
[. . .]

A time which Nature has intended
As relief for all the anxious, tired
Sorrow has left me as a sanctuary
It is then my anxiety is tended most:
My tired eyes pine away
They fall together, but without rest
For bitter thought-storms fly
From my dark grief-sea.]

Nordenflycht portrays an anxiety that renders her unable to rest as "nature has intended" or to find "relief" in sleep. Her tears – a customary physical manifestation of grief as well as of a sentimentalist ethos (Vincent-Buffault 1991, 53) – cause her eyes to "pine away" until they "fall together" from pain rather than repose. Emotional suffering is, accordingly, not just metaphorically but concretely entwined with physical pain. Revealingly, Nordenflycht's description of her eyes gives way to two composite words that further emphasize the physical impression of anxiety on the body. In the final lines of the stanza, the speaker claims that anxiety sends "tanke-stormar" [thought-storms], flying from "mit mörka sorgehav" [my dark grief-sea], making rest impossible.[11]

The words that best "approach my heart's meaning" centre on grief as an agonizing sensory experience. Nordenflycht seems to suggest that because mourning is excruciating for both body and mind, she cannot mourn silently or find comfort in "empty words." Grief renders her unable to respect convention – in that sense, for Nordenflycht grief constitutes a queer experience, one that pushes her away from hegemonic moral and aesthetic frameworks towards original expression. Sensory pain engendered by emotional suffering thus emerges as the epicentre of Nordenflycht's poetic endeavour. But what work does such pain perform in relation to Nordenflycht's poetic authority? In the final section of this chapter, I will offer a few suggestions by suspending my queer reading for a moment. Instead, I will relate *The Grieving Turtle Dove* to two early modern thought-complexes equally concerned with the feeling, sensory body: first protestant mourning practices, and second emerging philosophical theories of sensibility.

11 Nautical metaphors were popular in protestant conversion narratives (Pinch 1996, 41). This is thus another example of how Nordenflycht uses a devotional, literary trope to portray secular love.

Coming to One's Senses and the Proper Place of Emotion

I mentioned above that post-Reformation, protestant theologians began postulating mourning practices that departed from Catholic equivalents. As Patricia Phillippy notes in a study on women and death in early modern England, protestant grief should, in essence, be moderate, stoically acquiescent, and never cause the mourner to lose self-control. All these characteristics were typically demonstrated through the internalization of grief (Phillippy 2002, 7; see also Hodgson 2015, 6–8). From a protestant viewpoint, the physical manifestations of mourning common within Catholicism – such as weeping, scorned by Calvin as blasphemous (Dixon 2015, 31) – were signs of excessive grief that failed to properly consider divine providence. Similar notions pervade Swedish eighteenth-century funeral poetry. In a study of such poetry Ann Öhrberg notes, for example, that in Nordenflycht's contemporary Charlotta Frölich's (1698–1770) funeral poems, grief quickly gives way to hope and faith in providence. The Moravian preacher Magnus Brynolph Malmstedt (1724–1798) went further, never expressing any sense of grief in his funeral poems (Öhrberg 2001, 116; Öhrberg 2006/2007, 144).

Phillippy argues that protestant thinkers not only associated excessive, externalized grief with Catholics but also with women (of any religious bent), whom many considered emotionally ill-equipped to moderate grief (2002, 1, 7). A famous Swedish example of this phenomenon is the privy council's approach to Queen Maria Eleonora's (1599–1655) grief following the death of Gustavus II Adolphus in 1632. During the ensuing mourning period, the council recurrently remarked on Maria Eleonora's excessive grief and accused her of inappropriate behaviour such as throwing herself on the dead body "with too many kisses" (Persson 2021, 268).

But though considered inappropriate, Phillippy argues that external, immoderate manifestations of grief might also empower protestant women (2002, 3–4). For one thing, to grieve a husband or child showcased wifely and motherly virtue. Moreover, death was a productive *locus* for female authorship, with early modern literature comprising many grieving female *exempla* for authors to build on. As mentioned above, Nordenflycht's title *The Grieving Turtle Dove* refers to a common devotional image of the widow as abandoned turtle dove (Hansson 1991, 22). Relatedly, the poetic speaker's resolution to spend her life memorializing her husband reasonably taps into the popular story of the exemplary widow Artemisia – the first woman discussed, for example, in Madeleine de Scudéry's 1642 *Les femmes illustres, ou Les harangues héroïques.*

In addition, because women's grief was thought to cause a loss of self-control it could justify unconventional actions. As Phillippy writes: "The demarcation of wom-

en's grief as a particularly volatile emotional site, in effect, licenses women's writing and publishing of textual works of mourning" (2002, 9). In short, conventional ideas about female grief furnished women with opportunities to break with convention. When discussing *The Grieving Turtle Dove* and the Swedish context Blomqvist similarly remarks that "[s]orgen tar inte hänsyn till vad som passar sig, vad som får sägas eller inte" [grief does not consider what is appropriate, what is allowed to be said or not] (2016, 111).

I suggest that Nordenflycht's portrayal of grief as an extreme condition characterized by excruciating physical pain – a pain which forces her to complain, weep, sigh and sing – should be read in this light. To present grief as the source of original expression becomes both reasonable and acceptable against the backdrop of protestant, gendered notions of women's grief as a "volatile emotional site" within the space of which one might expect norms to be broken – because the grieving woman was unable rather than unwilling to respect them. Within this framework Nordenflycht's forceful feelings could be construed as clouding her judgement, rendering her incapable of making proper moral judgements. Therefore, if she departs from a virtuous path of silence into a world of writing, she must be excused.

In building on protestant stereotypes about gender and grief, *The Grieving Turtle Dove* exploits a negative notion of emotion and the senses. The idea that grief might lead Nordenflycht to reject silence against her better knowledge relies on an understanding of sensory and emotional experience as problematically impacting reason and morality. In some ways, such an understanding does resonate with Lutheran orthodoxy (Gerle 2015, 8, 134). By the 1740s, however, it was certainly being challenged – in Scandinavia not least by the above-mentioned Moravian movement (Lenhammar 2000, 82). Against that backdrop, I would like to address another thought-complex that might also underpin Nordenflycht's writing on the experience of grief and poetic authority: the philosophy of sensibility.

In its basic, early eighteenth-century meaning, the term "sensibility" – a philosophical counterpart, one might say, to sentimental literature – denoted heightened perceptivity, intense sensitivity to emotion, and strong empathy (Todd 1986, 7). It should be clear from the above quotations that Nordenflycht's account of grief contains numerous examples of all three components. How might this matter in relation to poetic authority? As Stephen Gaukroger argues in *The Collapse of Mechanism and the Rise of Sensibility*, towards mid-century sensibility grew, especially in France, to be regarded as an essential source of natural understanding and therefore as enabling – rather than impeding – judgement (2010, 390). Moreover, sensibility became increasingly intertwined with an emerging concept of virtue centred on sympathy and politeness. In the 1751 *Encyclopédie*, for example,

Louis de Jaucourt claims that “la sensibilité fait l’homme vertueux” [sensibility makes a man virtuous] (Jaucourt 1765, 52; see also Lindblom 2017, 61).

In *The Culture of Sensibility*, G. J. Barker-Benfield argues that just as women were considered naturally adept at the sentimental literary style, they were generally regarded as naturally sensitive. According to physician George Cheney’s influential theory of the nervous system laid out in *The English Malady* (1733), for example, women’s finer nerves made them more perceptive to sensations (Barker-Benfield 1992, 23). Like their earlier, protestant peers, many eighteenth-century thinkers thus considered women prone to be overcome by emotion (Barker-Benfield 1992, 23–27). But while early modern protestant theologians considered women’s powerful emotions inappropriate, towards the middle of the eighteenth century, philosophers were beginning to reconceptualize sensitivity to emotion into a crucial aspect of knowledge and morality, and as an admirable quality in all human beings (Barker-Benfield 1992, 28; Gaukroger 2010, 393).

Like sentimental literature, the concept of sensibility was only just developing in Europe when Nordenflycht wrote *The Grieving Turtle Dove*. Influential works such as David Hume’s *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–1740) or Étienne Condillac’s *Traité des sensations* (1754) were either unwritten or so newly published that they had hardly impacted Nordenflycht’s thought.[12] But significantly, one work that had done so was also an essential source for the concept of sensibility: John Locke’s hugely influential empiricist treatise *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689) (Gaukger 2010, 402). Nordenflycht took an early interest in Locke’s *Essay*.[13] The treatise explicitly provides the theoretical framework for her 1744 verse epistle “Wigtiga Frågor til en Lärd. Med Auktorens Egit Svar” [Important Questions to a Scholar. With the Author’s Own Reply], published in the poetry collection *Qwinligit Tankespel* [Female Thought-Play] in 1744. In her autobiographical letter, Nordenflycht explains that like *The Grieving Turtle Dove*, “Important Questions to a Scholar” stems from the mourning period following her husband’s death (1996, 13). In that poem, Nordenflycht writes:

12 Though Nordenflycht may have learned some English later in life, it is very unlikely she knew the language in 1743 and could read Hume’s work. She does not mention English in her autobiographical letter, where she describes learning German and French. She probably read Locke’s *Essay* in German translation.

13 In so doing she partook in a growing interest in Locke in Sweden, indicated by Swedish translations of *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* in 1709 and *Two Treatises on Government* in 1726 (Lindroth 1997, 67–68, 498–505, 533). Moreover, in a European context Nordenflycht was one of many women – Catharine Trotter Cockburn is perhaps the most famous – who used Locke as a springboard for their own thought.

Om det är sant, hwad *Locken* sagt,
Att Gud *Materien* kunnat gifwa
Förmögenhet til tankemagt,
Och såleds inga andar blifwa:
Så är ju det hans tanke-slut,
At hwad wi själ och anda kalla
Med döden lärer sönderfalla,
Och med wår Lifstid löpa ut.
(Nordenflycht 1744, 51)

[If it is true, as Locke has said,
That God can give unto all matter
The ability and force to think,
Which means there cannot be a spirit:
It must be his concluding thought,
That what we call the soul and spirit
Is apt to fall apart at death,
And end as mortal life does end.]

Here, Nordenflycht refers to Locke's (in)famous discussion in the *Essay* about the possibility of thinking matter and the unknowability of everything that eludes sensory experience. She does so to question the immortality and immateriality of the soul – a radical thing to do in the Swedish Lutheran context.[14] But interestingly, Locke is just one source for Nordenflycht's critical analysis of Lutheran orthodoxy. Later in the poem, she presents a second source: the experience of grief. As in *The Grieving Turtle Dove*, grief has led her to go against the grain of contemporary convention. She writes:

Hwad skall, i en så häftig nöd,
Dock trösta et förtwifladt hjerta,
Som af en så mång-dubbel död
Måst känna en owanlig smärta,
Som i en maka ser förgås
Sitt jordska allt, sit sinnes fägnad,
Sin dygdestöd, all timlig hägnad,
Förutan hopp at återfås?

Som af sin ögnasaknad har
En ständig sorg, en bitter jämmer;

14 In IV.3.6 of the *Essay*, Locke writes: "We have the ideas of matter and thinking, but possibly shall never be able to know whether any mere material being thinks or no; it being impossible for us, by the contemplation of our own ideas, without revelation, to discover whether Omnipotency has not given to some systems of matter, fitly disposed, a power to perceive and think, or else joined and fixed to matter, so disposed, a thinking immaterial substance" (Locke 1998, 405).

> Men dock et större qwal förfar
> Af twiflan, som så själen klemmer,
> At en så kär och ädel själ,
> Den man sit hela hjärta gifwit,
> Tör hända, har til intet blifwit,
> Och njuter ej et ewigt wäl.
> (Nordenflycht 1744, 53)
>
> [What will, in such intense distress,
> Comfort a despairing heart,
> That by such a multifold death,
> Must feel a pain most singular,
> Who in a husband sees perish
> Her earthly all, her mind's delight,
> Her support in virtue, all earthly care,
> Without hope it shall be regained?
>
> Whose longing provides her with
> A constant grief, such bitter sighs;
> But who suffers greater qualms
> From doubt that presses on her soul,
> That such a loved and noble soul,
> To which one has given one's whole heart,
> May have turned into nothing,
> And does not enjoy a constant good.]

Locke's *Essay* may have prompted Nordenflycht's questions. But it is her "constant grief" and "despairing heart" that justifies asking them – what else, she asks rhetorically in the first line of the quotation above, might console her? In the second stanza, Nordenflycht implies that she simply must explore the issues broached by Locke. Otherwise, they threaten to become yet another "oil on my fire laid," intensifying and aggravating her pain by adding "doubt, that presses the soul" to her grief. In "Important Questions to a Scholar" we thus see the same rhetorical strategy at play as in *The Grieving Turtle Dove*, grief serving as a source of (this time intellectual rather than poetic) authority.

In "Important Questions to a Scholar" Nordenflycht's doubt, and ensuing despair, concerns protestant doctrine about the soul's immortality. With reference to Locke, she calls this doctrine into question because it cannot be proven through sensory experience. That idea rests, of course, on Locke's foundational claim in book II.1.2 of the *Essay* that sensation and reflection – i.e., sensory experiences of the outside world and of our own mind – are "the two fountains" from which all knowledge springs (Locke 1998, 64). In "Important Questions to a Scholar" grief and sensory experience explicitly combine to validate Nordenflycht's critique of a hegemonic explanatory model.

Against this backdrop we might return to *The Grieving Turtle Dove* and the previously quoted stanza where Nordenflycht rejects “empty words”:

> Här [hur?] skal jag brista ut, hwar äro ord at finna?
> Hur kan dock tungans ljud mit hjertas mening hinna?
> Så häftigt sorgeswall, så plågsamt tanke lop
> Kan ej af toma ord få lugn, och ränsas op.
> (Nordenflycht 1743, 5)
>
> [Here [how?] shall I burst out, where are words to be found?
> How can the sounds made by a tongue approach my heart’s meaning?
> Such a violent grief-gush, such a painful thought-race
> Cannot by empty words be calmed or ordered up.]

Above, I considered this stanza as a comment on the impossibility to write sincerely by means of the “empty words” of poetic convention. But the phrase “empty words” might also refer to conventional explanatory models like those discussed in “Important Questions to a Scholar.” There, Nordenflycht considered such models to be as incapable to “calm” or “order” her thoughts as “empty words” are said to be here. Relatedly, Nordenflycht’s desire to express her “heart’s meaning” might be interpreted as an aspiration to base her beliefs about death and mourning on personal experience rather than on the “empty words” of hegemonic authorities. Such an objective is, of course, very much in line with both Lockean empiricism and the emergent conceptualization of sensibility as the basis of natural understanding.

Interpreted in this light, the above-quoted stanza serves as a comment on epistemology in addition to poetics. And interestingly, later in *The Grieving Turtle Dove* Nordenflycht returns to the confrontation between personal experience and conventional explanatory models. In poem V, she has the following to say about the established wisdom of “tender, helping voices”:

> Fly bort, i öma hjelpe-röster!
> Som gifwa wil min ängslan bot:
> Ert toma ljud, Er swaga tröster
> Uprycka ei min sorgerot:
> Hwad redan sked ei ändras kan,
> Det måste en ju willigt lida,
> Men är det lindring i min qwida,
> At ingen ändring är förhand?
>
> Ack! det är just den hårda knuten,
> Som ger min ängslan dubbelt lopp,
> Förwäntans tiden är förfluten,
> Och fåfängt är et ifrigt hopp:
> Min stränga Dom är redan fäld,

Ej hjelper suckar eller tårar,
Ett smickrand hopp mig ej mer dårar,
Jag är på plåge-platsen ställd.
(Nordenflycht 1743, 15)

[Fly away, you tender, helping voices!
That want to cure my anxiety:
Your empty noise, your feeble comfort
Does not pull up my grief-root:
What has happened cannot be undone,
This one must willingly accept
But does it bring succour to my lament
That no change is immanent?

Lo! It is this which is the hard knot
That gives double force to my anxiety,
The time of anticipation is over
And vain is every avid hope:
My harsh sentence has been passed
Sighs or tears help me not
I am not fooled by adulatory hope,
I am placed on the site of torment.]

In these stanzas, Nordenflycht scorns the advice about death and mourning offered by "helping voices" as nothing but "empty noise." Presumably, the poet alludes here to the protestant view that death (like all things) was an instance of divine providence and should thus be peacefully accepted. But Nordenflycht refuses to acknowledge such conventional notions about the meaning of, and appropriate approach to, death – the experience of grief detailed in *The Grieving Turtle Dove* has taught her that mourning is a "site of torment" and nothing else. Nordenflycht's personal sensory and reflective experience leads her to reject hegemonic explanatory models about death and mourning as "empty."

Arguably, this rejection builds on Locke's definition of virtue and vice in book II.28.5 of the *Essay*, where he links the morally good to pleasure and the morally bad to pain (Locke 1998, 253). Read in that light, Nordenflycht's detailed account of suffering and pain throughout *The Grieving Turtle Dove* acquires new meaning. Seemingly, when claiming to be "placed on the site of torment" by her husband's death she implies that since it gives rise to such horrendous pain, this death cannot – as the notion of divine providence would have it – be morally good.[15] Moreover, Nordenflycht's powerful grief and the epistemological author-

15 See Blomqvist, who also argues that emotional suffering leads Nordenflycht to question divine providence. She does not link this to Locke but to contemporary debates about theodicy (2016, 110).

ity awarded to that grief in the above-quoted stanzas strikingly align with the emerging concept of sensibility. Though there is no evidence that Nordenflycht knew Hume's work, it seems she would agree with his proclamation in *A Treatise of Human Nature* that "reason is, and always ought to be, slave to the passions" (Hume 1739, 415).

In *The Grieving Turtle Dove* as in "Important Questions to a Scholar" then, Nordenflycht builds on her experience of grief to question religious norms regarding death and mourning. As I have outlined above, in *The Grieving Turtle Dove* this experience is portrayed as profoundly sensory. It is an excruciatingly painful *sensation* of grief that sets "thought-storms" rushing through Nordenflycht's mind and causes her to question conventional explanatory models as "empty noise." Arguably, this process is very much in line with how sensibility began to be conceived in Europe as an aid to moral judgement. Within this framework, as opposed to the protestant one discussed above, Nordenflycht's emotional pain justifies her poetic endeavour because it guides judgement, helping her to judge about right and wrong regardless of what old authorities might claim. Therefore, if she departs from what has conventionally been conceived as a virtuous path of silence into a world of writing, she is right to do so.

Notions of sensibility and Lockean empiricism provided Nordenflycht with a definition of knowledge that was productive from the perspective of gender. Locke was no feminist. But his claim that all knowledge sprung from experience accrued through the senses enabled, at least in theory, anyone to produce such knowledge. Because she had experienced grief Nordenflycht had acquired knowledge. Moreover, the theory that women were more receptive to sensory impressions and emotions afforded them a central role in the development of a more general culture of sensibility (Barker-Benfield 1992, 23; Pinch 1996, 55). Against such a backdrop, *The Grieving Turtle Dove* – a poetic exploration of a woman's intense, agonizing experience of grief – was not just acceptable but laudable. As a woman able to share her emotional experience, Nordenflycht was not only excusable but right.

To Conclude

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Ahmed wonders if queer pleasure might render imaginable a re-configuring of bodies, enabling them to "'impress' differently upon the surfaces of social space, creating the possibility of social forms that are not constrained by the form of the heterosexual couple" (2004, 165). By way of

conclusion, I want to propose that in *The Grieving Turtle Dove* Nordenflycht explores a similar possibility in relation to grief.

In the first section of this chapter, I argued that *The Grieving Turtle Dove* chronicles a queer moment over the course of which Nordenflycht moves from a heteronormative life to a queer one as single woman and poet. To extend this argument, I might add that in so forcefully rejecting the silence that was the lot of a virtuous Lutheran woman, Nordenflycht grows to "impress differently upon the surface of social space" in ways "not constrained by the form of the heterosexual couple." In the second section, I noted that Nordenflycht justifies her queer redirection with reference to the sensory, bodily nature of her grief. In the third section, I related *The Grieving Turtle Dove* to contemporary thought-complexes to show how Nordenflycht made use of her mourning to challenge hegemonic explanatory models – "creating," to speak with Ahmed, the possibility of new forms of both writing and being. To tie these aspects of Nordenflycht's account together, I would like to end by suggesting that in *The Grieving Turtle Dove*, Nordenflycht explores what we might understand as a form of queer mourning – queer because in its excess it is anti-normative, queer because it leads the poet to abandon a normative life, and queer because Nordenflycht exploits it to (implicitly and explicitly) question both gender and moral norms.

Fascinatingly, Nordenflycht manages to develop her account of such queer mourning in ways that were not only accepted but appreciated by her readers.[16] As I have tried to show, this feat arguably has to do with the fact that Nordenflycht's staging of grief and of herself as grieving skilfully taps into thought-complexes and aesthetic repertoires old and new, combining familiar and innovative elements into a work wherein well-known truths seem to engender new possibilities. Though Nordenflycht would branch out in many different directions during the remainder of her career – and only rarely return to the topics of love and loss – this capacity to creatively challenge convention would grow to become the defining feature of her life as author.

16 One of many indications of Nordenflycht's success is her autobiographical letter, written only two years after the publication of *The Grieving Turtle Dove* at the request of biographer A. A. von Stiernman for inclusion in a work on illustrious Swedish women (Nordenflycht 1996, 3).

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