The period 1750–1850 saw the rise and consolidation of an ideal of marriage based on passionate love. Its history, like the history of all winners, has been well researched and documented. The story of those whom it could not convert remains yet to be told. The literary sources suggest that the unpersuaded engaged closely and creatively with the question, discarding dominant theories of female nature, developing new models of male nature, and introducing the battle of the sexes into political debate. In this essay I shall examine the work of three French aristocratic women—Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis (1746–1830), Antoinette Legroing de La Maisonneuve (1764–1837), and Constance de Maistre (1793–1882)—who vigorously criticized the enshrinement of passionate love within marriage in the process of devising what was at first an aristocratic, and later a monarchist, feminist ideal. The texts they wrote on the subject are almost completely unknown. Although Genlis is the subject of continuously expanding scholarship, the passages and some of the works by her that I examine here

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1 On the rise of amour-passion in the last half of the eighteenth century, see Allan Pasco, Revolutionary Love in Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century France (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).

have, to my knowledge, remained unstudied. Legroing’s works have never been analyzed, and one of her manuscripts has been lost. As for Maistre, she has so far been the subject of only one, biographical article, which is based mostly on her unarchived correspondence and does not even mention the fact that she published a book. Yet although little known, these women were innovative. In their novels, as well as in their moral, literary, and pedagogical treatises, they drew inspiration from the golden age of French feminism and women’s writing to rework the aristocratic ethic in response to the rise of bourgeois and republican notions of intimacy.

That the fortunes of passionate love should rise with those of republicanism and the bourgeoisie during roughly the same period—Reinhart Koselleck’s Sattelzeit—should come as no surprise. Passionate love has long been at the heart of democratic consciousness, with the experience of erotic passion being deemed central to the constitution of individual self-sovereignty. The French revolutionaries recognized this and refurbished marriage with liberty, reconceiving it as a voluntary contract of love that underpinned citizenship and stimulated patriotic allegiance. Intuitively, one might think that democracy’s institutionalization in marriage should have been accompanied by women’s emancipation. However, historians have long noted, perplexed, that although the Revolution furthered freedom in other areas—and although recent studies have emphasized that it created unexpected opportunities for women—revolutionaries and republicans generally sought to limit female self-empowerment. To explain this, Geneviève Fraisse has ventured that relegating women to the private sphere was crucial to building a strong notion of the public sphere (as well as to enforcing sexual domination).

I argue, however, that republican and revolutionary attitudes to women were formed in the struggle against a now-forgotten aristocratic feminism that sought to liberate women from the accusation of adultery. In the eighteenth century, women were believed to be more likely than

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3 The Contes moraux that she composed for her students. See François Cattois, Notice historique sur Mme Legroing de La Maisonneuve, in Extrait de la biographie universelle, vol. 71 ([Paris]: Impr. de Bruneau, 1842), 5.


men to initiate sexual and social disorder.\textsuperscript{11} Rousseau suggested as much in the preface to \textit{Julie, ou La nouvelle Héloïse} (1761), a major precursor of the romantic novel: “It seems that the sex always needs a time for libertinism, either in one state, or in the other. It is a bad leaven that ferments sooner or later.” \textsuperscript{12} This belief in the “bad leaven” animated republican demands for love-based marriage as an antidote to adultery.\textsuperscript{13} In reality, however, marital instability increased during the period of passionate love’s establishment,\textsuperscript{14} and indeed not all were persuaded by republican explanations of adultery or the means proposed to allay it. Searching for alternatives, some aristocratic women writers—the same ones who after the Revolution would end up on the Right—rewound the clock. They went back to a century when “mind [had] no sex,” to borrow the famous phrase of the Cartesian feminist François Poullain de la Barre (1647–1725)—or more accurately when it had less sex than it would have in the eighteenth century—when women’s literature was at its apex, and when the \textit{précieuses} refused to marry, denouncing marriage as slavery and dreaming up utopias of nonmarital love. Not that Genlis, Legroing, and Maistre were simply rehashing. Far from it: discrediting \textit{amour-passion} required new attitudes—especially to female learning—and new explanations of adultery that no longer put the burden of the blame on women. In this essay I shall explore how this trio renewed the old to represent the losing, now elapsed, and ultimately monarchist case in the struggle over love, learning, and femininity that raged from Revolution to Restoration.

**CRITIQUING AMOUR-PASSION**

Monarchists looked on erotic love with disquiet. In addition to engendering social disorder by manufacturing a mass of sovereigns who could challenge the one sovereign authority they venerated, this passion undermined the practice of liberty by distracting people from their various social duties. Indeed, royalists’ critique of passionate love and engagement with bourgeois republicanism were both driven by the desire to bolster individual freedom and the ideal of liberty as independence. This is true of even Legroing de La Maisonneuve, the most sympathetic of our authors to bourgeois ideals. She wrote two novels: \textit{Zénobie, ou L’heroine d’Arménie} (1794), a best seller during the Terror that went through at least three editions and was hailed as a new \textit{Télémaque} (1699), and \textit{Clémence: Roman moral, dans lequel les jeunes personnes dont le cœur seroit engagé, trouveront des principes et des exemples utiles} (1802). Though these tales ended, bourgeois style, with marriages of love, their most prominent theme is women’s freedom from passionate love.

\textit{Zenobia} is a figure that appears in most \textit{galeries des femmes} of the baroque period, where she was a staple of the literature and imagery of the \textit{femme forte}—a triumphant, Amazon-type figure who discarded voluptuousness for martial glory. Historically, there had been two \textit{Zenobias}: the first-century queen of Armenia who convinced her husband, Rhadamistus, to kill her so that she would not to fall into the hands of the Parthians but who survived the scimitar blow to be welcomed by the Parthian king Tirodades;\textsuperscript{15} and the third-century queen of Palmyra who extended her empire through conquest and led a revolt against the Romans. These two figures had a long literary afterlife in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France as the heroines of tragedies and

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\textsuperscript{11} See Natalie Zemon Davis, \textit{Society and Culture in Early Modern Europe}, chap. 5.


\textsuperscript{13} See Mainardi, \textit{Husbands, Wives, and Lovers}, viii.

\textsuperscript{14} Pasco, \textit{Revolutionary Love in Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century France}, 70.

\textsuperscript{15} Tacitus tells her story in book 12 of the \textit{Annals}. 
republics of letters

nearly fused to form a single figure. Thus, Legroing’s Zénobie is the queen of Armenia, but she is a martial heroine like the historical queen of Palmyra. And she resembles both of her historic forebears in being a symbol of aristocracy and royalty as well as a paradigm of femininity.

Psychologically, however, Legroing’s Zénobie descends mostly from her Palmyrene ancestor. She is forte and honnête, qualities that in the baroque period denoted chastity and honor. Forging alliances and marshaling troops, she reconquers Armenia from neighboring invaders, professing the love of glory and living among the Amazons. She recalls Pierre Le Moyne’s Palmyrene Zénobie, engaged in a “chase” where “it is Sovereigns who chase, and Sovereigns who are chased.”17 Legroing’s queen is also morally related to the Palmyrene protagonist of D’Aubignac’s tragedy Zénobie (1647), which showcases the femme honnête: this Zénobie, like Legroing’s, is a model of chastity and honor. Yet Legroing’s heroine is even older, since her honnêteté, by including learnedness, hails back to early seventeenth-century ideals and borrows from the baroque all the heroic feminine qualities that her creator wished the women of her own time to attain.

If Legroing’s Zénobie is Palmyrene in her psychology, she is Armenian in her relationships with her husbands. Zénobie, reyne d’Arménie, a 1653 tragedy by Jacques Pouset de Montauban (1610–85), may have inspired Legroing by antithesis. It tells the story of a woman who, consumed by a desire for revenge against her two brutal husbands, Rhadamiste and Tyridate, spends most of the play persuading the Roman consul, who is in love with her, to kill them. A corrupt variation on the femme forte, this Zénobie may be a female avatar of Pedro Calderón de la Barca’s Segismundo, another royal with a penchant for cruelty who finally spares his enemy. The theme of initially bloody and finally forgiving sovereigns goes back to antiquity, of course, but during a troubled period when royalists defended monarchies as the conciliatory alternatives to inherently partisan republics, the peacemaking destinies of monarchs probably impressed Legroing, whose own heroine institutes an armistice when she reascends the throne. This said, the Zénobie who seems to have moved her most is the protagonist of Crébillon père’s most famous play, Rhadamiste et Zénobie (1711), which was staged in Paris during the Revolution. Both this Zénobie and hers are the wives of a violently jealous prince, Rhadamiste; both are in love with virtuous and moderate princes (in Crébillon’s version, Arsame; in Legroing’s, Tiridates); both initially renounce their love out of duty but marry the men they love after Rhadamiste dies violently.

If in creating her learned, self-controlled, conquering, and harmonizing heroine Legroing borrows from baroque characters, in critiquing erotic love she adapts baroque literary themes. Zénobie is indebted to Honoré d’Urfé’s classic novel L’Astrée (1607–27), which associates the themes of the hunt and the flight from love and prominently features the pastoral tradition of the cult of Diana.20 Thus, when running away from her husband and avoiding her lover, Zénobie goes to live among a simple shepherd people who worship the goddess of the hunt. In a moment

19 From Calderón’s La vida es sueño (1635).
when Love (who, together with his mother, Venus, is the villain of the story) is tempting her, Zénobie invokes Diana (who, along with Minerva, is the novel’s good goddess). Hearing her prayer, the divinity of chastity abducts her and takes her to live among her army, where she teaches her captive to admire her nymphs, who live without husbands or lovers. 

Crucially, though, where Zénobie’s pastoral ancestors depict shepherd society as the sole possible haven of true love, Legroing’s novel represents it as a refuge from love — another sign of the story’s late eighteenth-century composition. The queen’s time among the shepherds is the period of her separation from her husband and her lover. Pastoral retreat also marks the widowhood of Faula, the royal Amazon who brings poetry, song, and religion to the shepherds after she decides to cease grieving for her dead husband Hercules and to enjoy “the sweetest of pleasures, that of doing good.” 

Thus, where the flight from love in L’Astrée is associated with the figure of the satyr, in Zénobie it is women who do the fleeing, building community and exonerating their sex symbolically from the imputation of lasciviousness.

Even warier than Zénobie, which presents Love as a deity of “anger, barbarity, and furor,” 

Legroing’s Clémence censures passionate love as a “poison” and as the “sad necessity” of “sensitive and tender” souls. 

“I have never believed,” writes Clémence, “in love at first sight, in irresistible inclinations, in sympathies that one cannot vanquish.” More severe than Zénobie, who neglects her studies when she begins her relationship with Tiridates, Clémence falls in love only as a result of “negligence.” 

the man who eventually becomes her fiancé, Alphonse, was first introduced to her as her brother, so that before she discovered his true identity, she grew close to him without constraint. Yet Clémence wishes that she had freed her heart in time. To her, passionate love always announces “crime or unhappiness,” and she advises her friend Zéphirine to avoid it as a blight on emotional life.

Such musings echo the opinion of Genlis, another admirer of the grand siècle and a foe of Romanticism and the Enlightenment who also rejected romantic love as a form of moral and emotional depletion. When discussing the fiancée of her son Théodore, the baronne d’Almane, the heroine-pedagogue of Genlis’s magnum opus, Adèle et Théodore, complains that the former’s “imagination is fixed only on Théodore, no occupation has attraction for her. That is not the daughter-in-law that I would have desired!” But Genlis went further than Legroing in condemning romantic love as a form of vanity and as a fictitious sentiment that flowered only fleetingly.

She traced its origins to immoral novels that exalted narcissism and ridiculous feelings, like Germaine de Staël’s Corinne (1807), which she parodied in Hortense, or the Victim to Novels and Travels (1808). The antiheroine of this last novella is a rich and pretentious intellectual with

21 Legroing, Zénobie, 278.
22 Ibid., 157–58.
24 Legroing, Zénobie, 26.
26 Ibid., 301–2.
27 Legroing may have borrowed this plot element from Montauban’s Zénobie, where the queen’s daughter, Perside, becomes betrothed to the man she once thought was her brother.
29 Ibid., 2:242.
30 Genlis, Adèle et Théodore, 3:332.
31 De Poortere, Philosophical and Literary Ideas of Mme de Staël and Mme de Genlis, 97, 72–73, 101, 151, 153, 154.
many follies, notably the wish to marry for love. An enthusiast of Corinne, she travels to Italy intending to emulate the novel’s events to the last detail, even taking a melancholy Scottish lover. With him, she painstakingly mimics Corinne and Oswald’s relationship, with the exception of the denouement: for unlike Corinne, Hortense lives, and unlike Oswald, her melancholy lover runs away with all her money. The story is a satirical execution of the baronne d’Almane’s comment that everyone’s life has been newly scripted, and that each is now convinced of a “chimerical fatality” according to which he or she must experience a great passion. Genlis’s opinion is that the “fatality” usually results in the abandonment of women.

Nor does amour-passion’s enshrinement in marriage in any way forestall women’s eventual loss of imaginative power. In fact, Genlis thinks it disastrous that a woman should marry a man whom she loves passionately, and she advises the restraint of passion in men as well. The fiancé of Adèle, the baronne d’Almane’s daughter, is in love with his betrothed, and Adèle might have encouraged this sentiment, but the baronne advises her expressly against it. Romantic passion can last at most one, perhaps three, years, and if encouraged during its apogee, it later leads to distancing. Instead, Adèle must only let her husband “see the sentiments that can last always.” In this way, she will inspire in him a “profound, inalterable attachment” and become his “confidante and friend” as well as “the object that he will love the best.” The advice is the precise contrary of that which the tutor gives to Sophie in book 4 of Rousseau’s Emile. For whereas Sophie is taught stratagems to intensify her husband’s passion for as long as possible, Adèle is instructed to moderate this passion for the brief time that it will last. On this point, the antithesis between the republican and monarchist points of view is total. But it shows that although Genlis practiced the open marriage common among the aristocracy—she was the mistress of the duc d’Orléans and possibly the mother of his children—she valued the bourgeois ideal of marital companionship.

Indeed, Genlis’s opinions on love and marriage were the exact obverse of those professed by the seventeenth-century feminists whom she otherwise extolled. The latter had denounced marriage: “It is only the state of Marriage which seems incapable of consolation as well as relief,” François de Grenaille (1616–80) had lamented. Joining in, Le Moyne had compared dressing brides to “adorning slaves and crowning captives, . . . taking them to prison with pomp and dancing.” Yet the same century that had decried weddings had also celebrated “inclination”—the word is Madeleine de Scudéry’s invention—especially after the triumph of absolutism imposed the differentiation of the sexes. Thus, although the princesse de Clèves—a favorite of Genlis, who has Adèle read her story at thirteen—had refused to marry for love, the précieuses had asked for nonmarital love and marriage by “inclination,” conjuring, in their novels, utopian courts of love

32 Genlis, Hortense, 113.
33 Genlis, Adèle et Théodore, 1:349–51.
34 De Poortere, Philosophical and Literary Ideas of Mme de Staël and Mme de Genlis, 73.
35 Genlis, Adèle et Théodore, 3:476.
36 Ibid., 478.
37 Ibid., 477.
38 See below.
40 Le Moyne, Gallerie des femmes fortes, 2:14.
The distance between these refined feminists and Genlis was carved out by the phantom of female adultery that eighteenth-century theories of female nature had called up as the nuclear family and the bourgeoisie’s closed marriage slowly gained literary ground. By the time the French Revolution arrived, it was no longer marriage that was bemoaned for enslaving women but women who were held responsible for destroying marriage, and in her novels, Genlis felt compelled both to acquit her sex and to protect the institution. Thus, when her vicomtesse de Limours—that innocent exponent of all bad opinions—argues that a woman who is not in love with her husband will necessarily take a lover, the baronne d’Almane counters: “The heart is made to love; I agree; it needs a sentiment that agitates and occupies it; but must it be love?”

Paradoxically, to save bourgeois-style marriage, Genlis imputed adultery to the very phenomenon that the bourgeoisie prescribed as its cure: passionate love. The contrast with the baroque is notable: where it had sought to expand love cautiously, the Counter-Enlightenment à la Genlis strove to strip love of passion. In fact, Counter-Enlightenment à la Legroing did so too: the difference between the two authors lay only in the degree to which their arguments were inspired by the baroque.

Like the “inclination” of the précieuses, a lack of passion could have utopian consequences. The community of Lagaraye, where the baronne d’Almane takes her children to learn bienfaisance, is a monarchy-cum-republic where people deposit their sentiments in universal objects. It is the creation of a single man, monsieur de Lagaraye, an extraordinary Legislator figure who was once victimized by passionate love but who recovered from the blow to testify to the wonders that the will of a single man can accomplish. Populated by the former poor, Lagaraye is a flourishing, laborious, and egalitarian republic where everyone wears plain gray clothes, including monsieur and madame de Lagaraye. It is an exceptional world, the kind that only outstanding individuals can create and perpetuate (the community of Lagaraye vanishes with the death of its founder), and then only in the right circumstances. The once-rich monsieur de Lagaraye is of spotless virtue and has only ever known one passion, his paternal love for his daughter, who died suddenly in the midst of her debutante party. Initially devastated but finally recovered from the “stupidity that derives from violent despair,” this overly emotional father concluded from his experience that “to attach oneself passionately to one object, to make all of one’s happiness depend upon it, is to expose oneself to pains, to torments of which the idea alone makes one tremble.” And it was following this realization that Lagaraye decided to extend his love altruistically to All.

An incarnation of Rousseau’s Legislator, this passionless yet boundlessly charitable and religious man inspires everyone around him. When he walks through the infirmary he has built, the patients look at him as if he were “a Divinity who deigns to descend into the Temple where he is implored, to spread there graces and benefits.” Madame de Lagaraye “admires her husband, and she loves him with a passion that reaches enthusiasm; she listens with avidity and rapture to all the praises he receives.” Such feelings, destructive in a normal world, are communally constructive in this one, because they run through the paragon of agape that educes them to reach humanity at large. Describing madame de Lagaraye, the baron d’Almane writes: “I understood ... that loving M. de Lagaraye so much, with a lively head, she had allowed herself to be led easily

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42 Ibid., 49.
43 Genlis, Adèle et Théodore, 1:349.
44 Ibid., 2:77, 78.
45 Ibid., 64.
to everything he had proposed to her.” 46 Empowered by her husband, madame de Lagaraye has become a legislator figure in her own right, contributing, for example, to designing the curriculum of the community’s schools. For his part, S. André, whom the Lagarayes saved from the most desperate poverty, is as moved by his benefactor as is madame de Lagaraye. In fact, S. André is even more affected, since he quite literally follows Lagaraye to the grave by falling dead upon his lowered coffin during the latter’s funeral, “a noble and touching victim of gratitude and friendship.” 47 Genlis’s moral is that when a rational and virtuous man who is free of passion becomes the Legislator-king of a society, emotional transparence is possible, since under these conditions all passions become communally constructive. In itself, the idea that a sentimentally see-through society can be formed once a foundational individual has experienced and renounced passion is very Rousseauian: the whole of Julie (1761) is premised upon it. The difference is that passions in Lagaraye are not erotic, and that once the leader has given them up, they no longer tempt him (so that unlike Julie, Lagaraye does not have to die to preserve his world, 48 but on the contrary, his world dies along with him).

Reflections on the communal consequences of emotion are largely absent from Maistre’s work, whose own attitude to marriage and passion was more radical and simple. Writing in the third decade of the nineteenth century, she, like her eighteenth-century forebears, critiqued passionate love and, like her seventeenth-century ones, rejected marriage. She also did so with an extremity that even the most resolute feminists of the pre-Fronde years, bursting with confidence before taking up arms against their king, would not have dared. Maistre’s book, Du célibat (1827), 49 argued that marriage based on “what is called inclination” was not just morally weakening, as it was for Legroing, or an act of deception, as Genlis maintained, but a “shameful and criminal engagement” that often ended in indifference, coldness, aversion, and sometimes even hatred. 50 Like Genlis, Maistre suggested that passionate love resulted in a roller-coaster ride of bliss and misery, and that women were usually queens before marriage and slaves after it. 51

Yet the abandonment that Genlis bewailed would be a blessing in Maistre’s worldview, because for her amour-passion’s true danger lay less in its ability to destroy relationships than in its power of emotional corruption. In defending this view, she was lending a psychoemotional basis to ecclesiastical suspicions of lust within marriage as sinful 52 — and ignoring the post-Tridentine acceptance of marital carnal love. Because worldly love, Maistre reasoned, blocks the development of the divine love that should alone command the human heart, 53 one should be attached to no creature. 54 “I,” she declared, echoing monsieur de Lagaraye, “love no one to the point that I fear losing them.” 55 This extreme stoicism may have been this passionate girl’s way of coping with the death of her parents, and especially of her father, Joseph de Maistre (1753–1821), whose

46 Ibid., 69–70.
49 The full title is Des différents états que les filles peuvent embrasser; et principalement du célibat, des motifs de s’y fixer, et des moyens d’y vivre saintement même au milieu du monde (Avignon: Seguin Aîné, 1827).
50 Ibid., 63.
51 Ibid., 149.
52 Pasco, Revolutionary Love in Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century France, 34.
53 Maistre, Du célibat, 190.
54 Ibid., 177.
55 Ibid., 144.
passing, by her own account, had struck her “speechless with pain”⁵⁶—hence the eighteenth and twenty-second reasons she lists in *Du célibat* for not getting married: not going through the pain of losing a husband and children who are sincerely loved⁵⁷ and “[finding] oneself, at death all alive . . . attached, bound to the objects of one’s most tender love.”⁵⁸

Dwelling on the displeasures of human company, these were utterly unpolicital and uncom-
munal views. In the world of the daughter of the famous conservative, feminism was an unrela-
tional matter, and social rapports functioned at best as auxiliary aids to spiritual development. Maistre’s father, Joseph, had had a different perspective. He had deplored the Revolution for its dissolution of familial bonds and insisted that the family must found society.⁵⁹ But in rejecting both passion and marriage completely, Constance de Maistre had decided to reject the world as well. Although she believed that marriages would be improved if passions were restrained, she seemed utterly uninterested in discovering how precisely this might happen and how society might benefit as a result. Hers was a celibate universe bereft of the earthly will to self-perpetua-

In all, royalist women seem to have been little agreed on the precise communal regime that would derive from the elimination of *amour-passion*. After all, charitable utopias, ancient queen-
ships, and societies without marriage have little in common—although, as we shall see below, they were all premised on key abstract concepts. What royalist women did agree upon was that theories of gender nature and relations would have to change for concord to reign inside and outside the home. Indeed, our authors went so far in this quest as to challenge eighteenth-cen-
tury theories of female nature and, along with these, the biblical account of the origin of evil that these theories bolstered or replaced. For in royalist circles at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, being a passionate woman was becoming as little fashion-
able as being one that lacked reason.

**EDEN RETOLD**

Traditionally, the idea of passionate women bereft of reason served well the initially absolutist, and later republican, ambition of creating a gulf between the sexes which Fénelon and Rousseau represented most famously. In the *Traité de l’éducation des filles* (1687), Fénelon challenged the Cartesian postulate that “mind has no sex” and wrote that little girls were born with a “violent desire to please” so destructive that the whole of girls’ education had to be oriented around containing it.⁶⁰ In *Emile, ou De l’éducation* (1762), Fénelon’s “spiritual child” enthusiastically adopted this view. And in *Julie*, as we have seen, Rousseau predicted that little girls, harboring the “bad leaven,” would grow up to be sexually dissolute at some point in their lives, either before or after marriage. This vision was hardly appealing to our three authors. Although Genlis bor-
rowed her pedagogy partly from Rousseau, she tellingly refused to incorporate his thoughts on

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⁵⁷ Maistre, *Du célibat*, 143.
⁵⁸ Ibid., 157.
women’s education. Sophie and Emile receive quite different instruction, but Adèle and Théodore are raised in a nearly identical manner. Legroing does not mention Rousseau, but she admires Fénelon: her character Clémence eulogizes him and declares that, among history’s known souls, his was the “masterpiece of the Creator.” This enthusiasm is consistent with Legroing’s greater tolerance for passionate love, as well as with the more domestic education that she gave the girls she taught at her school in Paris. Maistre too mentions Fénelon approvingly in her work, but either on subjects unrelated to female pedagogy or to quote his opinion that women can learn Latin as well as men. Maistre’s father, Joseph, had been sympathetic to Fénelon’s Traité, even citing its prescriptions in his letters to Constance’s sister, Adèle, but as we have seen, Constance would have none of it. She would probably have had even less of Rousseau. She never mentions him—he has no place in her devout baroque universe—and if her views on Émile in any way resembled her father’s, she probably spurned the entirety of his pedagogy.

These nuances aside, our three authors cast off Fénelon’s and Rousseau’s theories of feminine specificity to develop a model of male nature. Adopting an aristocratic stance of female superiority toward exploitative and irresponsible male behavior, they suggested that it was, not women, but men who were at the root of libertine and adulterous turmoil. Building on seventeenth-century feminists like Le Moyne, who mentioned women’s subjection to men’s infidelity, they explained unfaithfulness psychologically as a male malady. Germeuil, one of the protagonists of Genlis’s novel La femme auteur (1804), is passionately in love twice, at first with madame de Nangis and later with the heroine Natalie. He swears eternal fidelity to both women, and he leaves both for another. Madame de Nangis—a character who recalls the présidente de Tourvel from Les liaisons dangereuses (1782)—dies when he abandons her. But Germeuil is no vicomte de Valmont. He simply represents his sex’s fickleness in love: “it is above all in love that the heart of men is inexplicable,” observes Genlis when introducing his character. In marriage, this irrationality can have dire consequences, since besides estranging the spouses, it can bring male “tyranny” into the home—as when the vicomte de Limours forces upon his wife his mistress’s ill choice of husband for their daughter Flore.

Looking on men more kindly, Legroing thinks of them, not as mercurial, but as the original bearers and transmitters of passionate love. Zénobie’s tutor, Sohême, suggests this when he first realizes that Zénobie is in love: “A man,” he tells her, “has already slipped into your heart softness and voluptuousness.” Legroing’s male characters are extremely passionate. Her Rhadamiste, as we have seen, is violently jealous like Crébillon’s. Alphonse, the hero of Clémence, is obses-

61 Legroing, Clémence, 2:139–41.
62 See Legroing’s pedagogical treatise, Essai sur le genre d’instruction le plus analogue à la destination des femmes (Paris: Impr. de Dufart, an VII [1798]).
63 Maistre, Du célibat, 7, 26, 52.
67 Maclean, Woman Triumphant, 187.
69 Legroing, Zénobie, 28–29.
70 Ibid., 32.
sive. “What he wants, he wants strongly”—a trait that drives Alphonse to risky and rebellious behavior whenever obstacles to his love are raised, much to Clémence’s displeasure. Even Zénobie’s “sweet and moderate” Tiридates is led astray by Love: the god himself appears to him and tells him to cease sacrificing to Minerva. Love’s doves then lead him to Zénobie, accompanying his walk with their “plaintive cooing.” An excess of virtue misleads you,” Tiридates tells his beloved on meeting her. Together with another male character, Pirois, he pleads with her to ignore her marriage vows to Rhadamiste and marry him instead—the episode that triggers Diana’s abduction of Zénobie.

Men are thus the deluded victims of intense yet openly acknowledged feelings. But they can be worse—elusive seducers who hide their passions in order to serve them better. “It is true that they care only about cheating us,” says the baronne d’Almane to Adèle in an uncharacteristically immoderate moment, “about feigning sentiments that they do not feel, in order to seduce us, and be able to boast afterward.” “That makes one shudder!” replies Adèle. Similarly, Maistre cites male duplicity as another reason that women should not marry. “Most of the time,” she writes, “one commits oneself without knowing to whom.” Men often do not show their true characters before marriage: during courtship they are quietly and patiently submissive, but after marriage, when their true personalities emerge, “horrible storms” await the new bride, including infidelity and jealousy.

Passionate love thus laid at men’s door, women’s task becomes to mitigate its consequences. Zénobie and her goddesses are allied to this end. When Tiридates and Pirois are crying and begging her amid Love’s doves to marry Tiридates, Zénobie prays to Diana to save her, reminding the goddess of the aid she once gave to Arethusa. Instantly thunder bursts from all sides: Diana descends from the skies, surrounds the queen with a cloud impenetrable to the eye, abducts her, and transports her to the middle of her army, which was waiting already for her in the forest. The change is total: from a dove-filled world of male voluptuousness to a martial, female one of adventure and discipline.

In more modern and less military times, letter writing substitutes for the gods. Like Genlis, Legroing explores the theme of female solidarity in matters of love through epistolary pairs of female friends who exchange impressions on gender relations. In these pairs, the heroine and moral pedagogue is a woman of reason, while her friend-disciple is one of the heart. Zéphirine tells her beloved Clémence: nature “has made you be born to think, and me to feel . . . with you the mind dominates the heart, and with me the heart dominates the mind.” In La femme auteur, Dorothée is likewise reasonable and respected, and her sister, Natalie, passionate and disparaged.

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71 Legroing, Clémence, 1:188.
72 Legroing, Zénobie, 32.
73 Ibid., 249.
74 Ibid., 251–52.
75 Ibid., 253.
76 Genlis, Adèle et Théodore, 3:276–77.
77 Maistre, Du célibat, 125.
78 Ibid., 126, 127.
79 Arethusa was a nymph of Diana. Amorously pursued by the river god Alpheus, she prayed to her goddess, who saved her by enveloping her in a cloud and turning her into a fountain (that of Ortygia in Syracuse).
80 Legroing, Zénobie, 255.
81 Legroing, Clémence, 2:54.
As for the baronne d’Almane, she is a studious and retiring character who finds her greatest happiness in reflection, while her friend, the vicomtesse de Limours, is emotionally expansive, has trouble concentrating, and loves her friend dearly, calling her “my heart.” Psychologically, the pairs Clémence-Zéphirine, Dorothee-Natalie, and baronne d’Almane vicomtesse de Limours are flawless Cartesian antitheses of the Claire-Julie team of Rousseau’s Julie: in this last novel—which Genlis despised—the heroine and social builder is not the transparent and rational Claire but Julie, the emotional volcano who initiates sexual relations with Saint-Preux.

Regardless of women’s particular character, though, all must find ways of bringing amorous men back to reason. Clémence reminds Alphonse that his duty to family and society must take precedence over his passion; the baronne d’Almane wins back her husband, who had developed a “violent passion” for another woman, through firmness and affection. The duty of wives, she tells the vicomtesse, is to inspire in their husbands reasonable and useful feelings. Only so will men cease tyrannizing and abandoning them and be distracted from the passionate love that is native to their sex. As for Maistre, less concerned to improve marriage than to prevent it, she has fewer thoughts on rational female solidarity. Yet she, too, upholds it in her own way: her book, written by a woman for women, fulfills the role of the baronne’s letters to the vicomtesse and of the goddesses’ training of Zénobie. As she remarks: “in writing I have not sought to make my intelligence shine but to make the truth be known to many persons of my sex.”

Yet this is by no means a world of pure transparency, for while women pursue rational truth together, men must, on the contrary, be deliberately deluded about the opposite sex. In Adèle et Théodore, the parents of Théodore and of his fiancée, Constance, pretend that they have fallen out and that the marriage is off so as to inflame the young man’s feelings for his bride-to-be. Similarly, Adèle’s parents raise her up into an almost unobtainable object in order to make her prospective husband fall in love with her. As we have seen, these feelings will not last forever, and the wives should not encourage them; but given men’s fickle nature, they must be stirred at first so as to attach the young men to their wives. From the republican point of view—and Genlis has republican sympathies—passion also has the advantage of developing political personas. Significantly, Théodore goes to war to defend his fatherland only after he is in love.

Developing young girls’ passion, on the contrary, is highly undesirable: the baronne regards Constance’s passionate love for her fiancé as evidence of the bad education she has received; while Adèle writes to her own betrothed that she will sacrifice him at once if he ever requires her to be separated from her family and to live anywhere except in her mother’s house. Her world, like Legroing’s, is both monarchical and matriarchal: the women in it are reasonable and dispassionate; they share with men the patriotic glory of writing and the civic responsibility of educating; and in extraordinary places—like Lagaraye or madame d’Almane’s household—they can even legislate.
CULTIVATING THE “CELESTIAL VEGETATION”

Laying love’s blame on men, however, was not enough. To render women reasonable, one had to further their learning, and to do so, one had to combat theories of female nature yet again, this time those holding that women’s greater sensibility and imagination deprived them of genius and rational powers.87 Although “men of letters,” wrote Genlis in her own, literary-critical version of a baroque galerie des femmes,

have over women authors a de facto superiority that it is impossible to . . . contest . . . one should not conclude that the organization of women is inferior to that of men. Genius is composed of all the qualities that one does not deny to [women], and that they can possess to the highest degree; imagination, sensibility, elevation of soul.88

Agreeing with Genlis, Maistre contradicted her father, who in 1808 had written to her in the very vein that Genlis regretted, arguing that women’s historically lesser intellectual production confirmed their lack of genius.89 Constance refuted him by appealing to Fénelon’s and Rollin’s opinion that girls were as capable of learning Latin and the other sciences as boys90—and by expediently omitting to mention that Fénelon wanted girls to learn Latin not in order to study ancient poetry and the church fathers, as she did (he thought such reading dangerous for women) but in order to follow the divine service.91

Study, our feminists argued, was also good for women because it enabled ecstasy: “When one writes with truth,” says Genlis of Natalie’s writing moments, “when one looks only in the heart for the moving feelings that one wants to express, there is in this occupation such charm that it can easily take the place of happiness.”92 More enthusiastic, Legroing spiritualized learning. “The contemplation of this celestial vegetation,” she wrote of the arts and sciences, “is certainly the most perfect of all enjoyments,” and the happiest humans are those who deliver themselves to it “not by cupidity or pride but by inclination, [to live] in the midst of an ideal world.”93 Girls, too, can have “inclination,” and those who do should pursue it: “not to cultivate the gifts that a child has received . . . is it not to make oneself guilty toward her?”94 The use of the word “inclination” is meaningful here: it was Madeleine de Scudéry’s neologism for romantic love, and by using it to refer to studying, Legroing posited the arts and sciences as love’s replacements and spiritual superiors.

Maistre concurred: “I have made of the high sciences my most chaste delight.”95 She had had to strive to achieve this. At seventeen, she had written to her father that she wished to remain single in order to devote herself to studying. Voltaire was right, she said, that women were capable

88 Genlis, De l’influence des femmes sur la littérature française, iii–iv.
89 Joseph de Maistre, Œuvres complètes, 11:143.
90 Maistre, Du célibat, 7.
91 Fénelon, Traité de l’éducation des filles, 135.
92 Genlis, La femme auteur, 66.
93 Legroing, Essai sur le genre d’instruction le plus analogue à la destination des femmes, 45, 44.
94 Ibid., 67.
95 Maistre, Du célibat, 7.
of the same intellectual attainments as men.96 Worried that without a husband she would end up poor, that her choice of celibacy might be motivated by vanity and the “love of glory,” that she would have to endure jealousy and ridicule as did Genlis’s heroine Natalie, and hating Voltaire deeply in any case, Joseph had objected strongly, calling her aversion to marriage a “vice.”97 Constance had chafed loudly but submitted to this opinion. When she finally met her father at the age of twenty-one, she became his personal secretary, staunchest supporter, and “little Chamber of Commons,” as he lovingly called her.98 She felt his death deeply, composed a devoted account of his last days,99 and wrote: “no one in the family has lost as much as I.”100 Yet so much filial piety could never convince Maistre that her father was right about women’s celibate learning. The proof is that, six years after his death, she published what was probably the only work in nineteenth-century France recommending it to women.

The thorny question was how far learning should go. As far as Maistre was concerned, single women who had renounced worldly love could give themselves entirely to the studious “delight.” She joined seventeenth-century religious feminists in believing that learning was an aid to salvation,101 that it encouraged piety, devoutness, chastity—the elements of honnêteté that governed her life. On this point she disagreed with Legroing, who again conformed to bourgeois convention by insisting on studious moderation. The heroine of Clémence consistently uses the language of “désennuyer”—literally, “unboring”—as well as of amusement or distraction to describe her composition of stories and plays,102 and she is downright annoyed when she is sent to Paris to perfect her music.103 Her creator practiced in life what she preached in her novels. At the school she ran, Legroing refused to institute prize competitions among her pupils for fear of “[destroying] the friendly intimacy that [reigned] between them” and of seeing them become “ambitious, jealous, and delivered already to all the evils that desolate humanity.”104

Once again, Genlis struck a middle position between Maistre and Legroing. She resembled Legroing in her worldly perspective and Maistre in her desire to place no bounds on women’s cultivation of the arts and sciences. “Why should it be forbidden [to women] to write and become authors?” she asked in De l’influence des femmes sur la littérature française (1811). “I know all the arguments that can be opposed to this kind of ambition. I have made them myself in the past with that sentiment of justice that often pushes impartiality all the way to exaggeration. Now, at the end of my career, I can speak more freely in regard to this, because I feel completely disinterested in a cause that I no longer regard as my own.”105 Genlis was distancing herself from La femme auteur, whose story of a woman writer abandoned by her fiancé, libeled by the public, and persecuted during the Revolution contained multiple autobiographical references. With hindsight, she suggested that her novel was less a warning to women to mute their literary

96 Joseph de Maistre, Œuvres complètes, 11:143.
97 On Maistre’s objection to Voltaire’s dictum, see Maistre to Constance, October 24, 1808, in Joseph de Maistre, Œuvres complètes, 11:141–46; and on Maistre’s criticism of Constance’s ambition to study and remain single, see Jacques Lovie’s citation of Maistre’s letter to Constance of November 19, 1810, in “Constance de Maistre,” 144.
98 Lovie, “Constance de Maistre,” 147.
100 Lovie, “Constance de Maistre,” 147.
101 Maistre, Du célibat, 93.
102 Legroing, Clémence, 2:38, 113.
103 Ibid., 1:237.
104 Legroing, Essai sur le genre d’instruction le plus analogue à la destination des femmes, 97–98.
105 Genlis, De l’influence des femmes sur la littérature française, xxi.
ambitions than a complaint about the treatment women writers received in her time. Things had been different during the grand siècle. “In that century when mores were infinitely more serious than ours,” she wrote,

> there was a multitude of women authors of all kinds and in all the classes; and not only did people of letters [les gens de lettres] not get wild on them [ne se déchaînèrent point], did not decry against women authors, but they took pleasure in giving them their worth and in rendering to them all the homage of esteem and gallantry. This conduct, this procedure, has nothing that should be surprising. ¹⁰⁶

Furthermore, the difficulties that women writers have since faced are not only to their detriment but to France’s as well, since “all [women writers] have shown in their works the love of the fatherland.” ¹⁰⁷ If in matters of love and marriage, then, Genlis was a woman of her century, when it came to literary feminism, she was a true heir of the baroque.

Women’s literary patriotism, however, did not mean that they could become involved in les grandes affaires. Retaining eighteenth-century theories of female nature only in this respect, Adèle et Théodore observes that women are imprudent beings who should not get involved in politics. ¹⁰⁸ In this particular respect, Genlis was the most republican, the least royalist, and the least pious of our trio. Legroing and Maistre were more providentialist: women, they suggested, were politically inactive because that was how Providence had made society. Should society change, however, there were, at least potentially—and as Legroing’s legends of queenship suggest—no bounds on just how political women could become. It was a royalist point of view.

### IMPROVING MARRIAGE, FOUNding SOciETY

Yet though they might enter politics, women should never become agents of the absolutist erot-ics defended by Rousseau. The ethic of the citizen of Geneva was anathema to our authors because it politicized individuals unto the stifling of civil liberty, which was itself a gift of God. What was needed instead was a libertarian authoritarianism, a regime akin to Montesquieu’s monarchy where civic liberty flourished thanks to the multiplication of intermediary powers.

Establishing this regime required a new emotional administration to diminish the erotic distance that had widened progressively between men and women since the late seventeenth century. In particular, a cult of sincerity would have to replace the encouragement of manipulation that had flourished in eighteenth-century novels. Rousseau was again the perfect antithesis to our monarchists. A woman, he wrote in Emile, that master text of manipulation, “must learn to discern [men’s] feelings through her words, her actions, her looks, through her gestures. It is necessary that, through her words, her actions, her looks, her gestures, she know how to give them the feelings that she likes, without even seeming to think about it.” ¹⁰⁹ Contemporary novels illustrated this advice. The Lettres de madame du Montier (1767) by the extremely popular Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont (1711–80), for example, depicts a woman, who is adored by

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¹⁰⁶ Ibid., xxxiv–xxxv. Genlis’s argument here prefigures DeJean’s in Tender Geographies.

¹⁰⁷ Genlis, De l’influence des femmes sur la littérature française, 369.

¹⁰⁸ Genlis, Adèle et Théodore, 2:226.

her husband, manipulating him into ceasing his fits of rage by agreeing with him on everything until he admits how unjust he really is.

That manipulation should be associated with *amour-passion* is hardly surprising: honesty destroys erotic distance. And that Genlis and Legroing should replace it with affection for one’s husband likewise has its logic in a monarchist universe bent on avoiding political absolutism. Genlis’s vicomtesse de Limours writes to the baronne d’Almane that, although she has long been married, it was only after her husband rekindled his affair with another woman that it occurred to her that she might love him:

I have spent fourteen years without thinking for a moment about the advantage that could result from finding one’s friend in one’s husband; it is only during the last eighteen months that I have advised myself to think of it; all of a sudden I have seen M. de Limours with new eyes, or, to say it better, I have looked at him, I have listened to him, and I have known, with inexpressible surprise, that if I had not loved him until then, it was solely out of distraction, and because I had occupied myself with completely different things. When one has passed the age of thirty, when one has renounced coquetry, when one is tired of dissipation, one has nothing better to do than to love one’s husband if one can.¹¹⁰

The vicomtesse draws a caricature of what aristocratic marriage was according to its bourgeois critics: an arrangement between two near strangers who commit adultery (the vicomtesse has no lovers but she used to be coquettish and have admirers). The alternative that the baronne recommends incorporates some features of the bourgeois critique of aristocratic ménages.¹¹¹ Above all, husband and wife must not be idle or lead wholly separate lives: instead, they should collaborate in cultivating the arts and sciences, both for their own benefit and to educate their children. Contrary to the republican argument that reading leads to adultery, and Latin to debauchery,¹¹² Genlis believes that these things, when well employed, prevent it. In fact, she agrees with mademoiselle d’Espinassy¹¹³ that only properly educated women can be good guides for their husbands—one reason that the baronne’s marriage is happy, and the vicomtesse’s is not.¹¹⁴

A proper education, in turn, includes training in beneficence. Much of Adèle’s upbringing consists in the practice of charity. As a small child, she makes clothing for the poor; when she is twelve, she gives half of her pocket money to the needy; as an adolescent, she gives all of it; and as a married woman, she sets up a school for poor girls, which she co-runs with friends and family and where she is herself a teacher. It is the literary, poverty-oriented equivalent of the school that Genlis herself created at Bellechasse for the Orléans children. It also represents female royalists’ desire that women should become communal founders and educators. Legroing too has this wish: her Clémence writes morally inspiring fiction for her grandfather, her friend, and her grandfather’s village—fiction that itself contains tales about queens who form and found societies. Zénobie brings wisdom and peace to Armenia; Faula imparts poetry, song, and the cult of Diana to a pastoral people; and the fabulous female sovereigns who govern the islands of Clémence’s tale *Le petit Serpolet* are patrons of the arts and sciences.

¹¹⁰ Genlis, *Adèle et Théodore*, 1:221.
¹¹¹ See Verjus, *Le bon mari*.
Interestingly, Legroing’s resort to myth and antiquity enabled her to convey messages unavailable to Genlis. Through Zénobie, she could celebrate hereditary queenship in a country that had known only the Salic law, and at a time when royalism was proscribed and royalists were put to death. She could praise female civilizing figures in years when women were explicitly excluded from the public sphere, and when their social, political, and legal fortunes were beginning to decline. Most uniquely, she could present, in her queens, the rational, self-mastered, and politically dominant negatives of the sentimentally explosive Julie, mistress of Clarens, eighteenth-century francophone literature’s most famous female social founder.

The political women of which our monarchists dreamed, however, were superior to men (as queens), not on a par with them. In the public sphere, gender equality could be very destructive, as La femme auteur illustrates. When the first book by the heroine Natalie appears, the journals rave, and her fiancé Germeuil gets jealous. “Everyone now knows you like me!” he complains to Natalie. “Isn’t it a sort of infidelity of which your lover has the right to complain?” The situation worsens when Natalie publishes her second book. Envious of her continued success, the journalists now hurl “extravagant slander” at her. Courageously, Natalie’s sister, Dorothée, takes up her defense, but Germeuil remains passive and his love turns sour: “all those poisoned darts, thrown against her, almost entirely annihilated love in the heart of Germeuil. Natalie was not blackened in his eyes, but her name was profaned by nastiness; and love is a sentiment so bizarre and so delicate that it can be altered by a lot less.” Eventually, Germeuil leaves Natalie and marries a fameless pedant.

Gender relations are thus ruined by public passions; but they can be strengthened by the friendship that blossoms within the semipublic realm of community building and education. Genlis speaks of “finding one’s friend in one’s husband,” and of a husband being “a protector, a friend.” Legroing assents. The love of Clémence for Alphonse resembles friendship more than any other sentiment. “When I see Alphonse’s passion,” writes Zéphirine to Clémence, “I understand nothing about yours. It resembles friendship much more than it does love.” In addition to diverting passion, friendship has the merit of enabling sincerity and with it a lasting bond between spouses. “Admit your mistake with honesty,” the baronne tells the vicomtesse when advising her on how to win back her husband. Sincerity likewise unites Clémence and Alphonse: he is fully aware of how she influences his taste, his opinions, and “the entire system of [his] conduct.” This emphasis on marital closeness through friendship was once again an effect of the baroque. As Le Moyne had observed: “of all the kinds of Friendship, there is none so close, or better joined than that of Marriage.” It was a view that stood out in the midst of

117 Genlis, La femme auteur, 78.
118 Ibid., 85.
119 Genlis, Adèle et Théodore, 1:335. On Genlis’s preference for interspousal respect and affection in her novel Madame de Maintenon (1806), see De Poortere, Philosophical and Literary Ideas of Mme de Staël and Mme de Genlis, 59.
120 Legroing, Clémence, 2:51.
121 Genlis, Adèle et Théodore, 1:230.
122 Legroing, Clémence, 3:52–53.
123 Le Moyne, Gallerie des femmes fortes, 2:18.
a modern period philosophically indifferent to friendship. And it represented a return to the ancients, those experts on friendship who had declared that it was “the happiest and most fully human of all loves.”

Predictably, however, Maistre disagreed. Eschewing friendship with her customary radicality, she did not deem it passionate love’s antithesis and superior but listed it among the sentiments—including tenderness, love, and passion—that together formed the “shameful and criminal engagement” that she termed “inclination” and that, like all worldly loves, she viewed as a potential obstruction in the ascent to God. Her extremity is suggestive: compared with her, Legroing and Genlis emerge as the moderate proponents of a middle way between emotional excess and rigorous asceticism that aspired to establish genuine companionship between the sexes, polities where women founded community and could be queens, and a hierarchical, maternalist civic order where a hardworking aristocracy educated and succored the poor.

CONCLUSION

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw the rise of an aristocratic, feminist, and ultimately monarchist ethic that opposed bourgeois and republican ideals of marital love. In the beginning, this ethic was above all a class defense against bourgeois accusations—intellectually drawn from Fénelon and Rousseau—that aristocratic marriage was ridden with adultery, which was in turn produced by women’s inborn tendency to dissolution. Adultery, aristocratic feminists implied, arose not out of female nature but out of passionate love and the men to whom it was native. Unable to find reinforcement for these ideas in the thought of their own time, aristocratic writers sought inspiration in the seventeenth century, the golden age of French feminism and women’s writing. There, they found a mentality that valorized women as political, military, and literary leaders and that did not insist on the specificity of their sex. They discovered models of femmes fortes and femmes honnêtes to emulate. And they encountered a critique of marriage that they replaced or supplemented with a critique of passionate love.

Attitudes to love could be strongly politicized, to the point that they functioned as good predictors of personal politics. Of our three authors, Legroing made the greatest allowances for amour-passion, and accordingly, Napoleon offered her the position of superintendent of the academy that he founded at Écouen for the education of the daughters and sisters of the members of the Legion of Honor. He probably reasoned that her bourgeois-friendly yet aristocratic views on love and marriage harmonized well with his project to reconcile Old Regime and Revolution. A lesser compromise was wrought by Genlis, who critiqued passionate love more ferociously but with the bourgeois aim of reforming marriage and turning women into educators and community builders. Aptly, Genlis was the governess of Louis-Philippe, the “bourgeois monarch,” and accepted a pension from Napoleon on returning to France. Maistre alone did not compromise: in rejecting marriages of love completely, she confirmed her legitimist and counterrevolutionary inheritance in a revolutionary move that evoked baroque marital pessimism to the point of questioning marriage itself as a state desirable for women.

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126 Maistre, Du célibat, 63.
127 Cattois, Notice historique sur Mme Legroing de La Maisonneuve, S.
128 On Bonaparte’s view of women, see J. K. Burton, Napoleon and the Woman Question: Discourses of the Other Sex in French Education, Medicine, and Medical Law (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2007).
The French Revolution’s institutionalization of bourgeois marital ideals and in particular its rehabilitation of passion threw the aristocratic feminism represented by our authors to the Right. That should make sense. Monarchist politics had no use for eroticism: there was no need to create and strengthen wills through the emotions in a polity where the sovereign will belonged to an individual who reigned de facto. Passionate love for worldly objects, though tolerated after Trent, was also still suspect in the Catholic tradition that supported monarchism at the time—especially when such love became all-consuming, as it did in contemporary republican novels like those of Sophie Cottin (1773–1807), another nemesis of Genlis’s.

It is not that monarchist feminism was purely critical. A political reading of our authors’ family ideology discloses the outlines of two kinds of monarchist polities, one ordinary and the other extraordinary. When conjuring the latter, Genlis depicts a utopian monarchy-cum-republic led by an utterly altruistic king-Legislator whose perfectly dispassionate benevolence enables legislative opportunities for women and genuine passionate transparency for both sexes. When describing normal times, she envisions a flourishing civic culture founded on submission to male monarchs, military glory and political distinction for impassioned men, and literary glory and communal leadership for rational women. Legroing too has her normal “monarchy”: the one presided over by Clémence’s quiet grandfather, a semipublic realm where rational women can cultivate the arts and forge lasting marital friendships with loving men. The difference between ordinary and extraordinary polities is thus similar for Legroing and Genlis: in the extraordinary ones, women play greater political roles, whether as queens or as Legislators, respectively. Maistre, as usual, is the odd woman out: the kingdom she dreams of is not of this world, and the endless spiritual and intellectual possibilities it holds for women are premised on an utter indifference to politics.

In all, in drafting their monarchical worlds, French aristocratic feminists of the revolutionary age addressed the republicanism they combated and built on a terrain that the bourgeoisie had selected. When they attacked *amour-passion*, they dug up the secreted keystone of the edifice of democracy. When they promoted learning and recommended marital friendship, they tried to construct a free polity no longer negligent of spousal relations like the Old Regime, yet much less dependent on erotics and sexual difference than contemporary republicanism. Their thoughts bring a fresh perspective to an age of “marriage crisis,” marriage reform, and democratic transformation—as well as a heartening view of the eternal question of friendship between the sexes.
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