INTRODUCTION
LA GRANDE MADEMOISELLE

In this world, although one can distinguish what is permanent from what is only a passing breeze, one should nonetheless heed the breeze, for sometimes it is more prudent to do so than to neglect it.

—Anne-Marie-Louise d’Orléans, duchesse de Montpensier, Memoirs

THE OTHER VOICE

In seventeenth-century France, these three rules were ironclad:

1. The life of any individual important enough to be received by the king was centered around court activities.

2. A woman who had the family connections and the financial assets necessary to enable her parents to negotiate a marriage on her behalf was obliged to accept their proposition—no matter how unappealing she found the man who had been selected for her.

3. Once married, the woman’s life became, in legal terms, completely subservient to that of her husband. If she had any intellectual or artistic aspirations, she forgot them; a truly remarkable number of women writers were publishing in seventeenth-century France, yet that was exactly the plan of action advised by the correspondence published for the first time in its entirety in this volume.

To break even one of these unwritten rules of conduct was already bold. To break all of them was quite simply unthinkable. And yet that was exactly the plan of action advised by the correspondence published for the first time in its entirety in this volume.

In early modern Europe, the marriage of an aristocratic woman was always a thoroughly political matter; it was understood by all concerned that she was first and foremost a commodity. She belonged to her family, whose role it was to negotiate the exchange of her hand for whatever it needed most—money, social advancement, a military alliance. The higher her rank,
wealthy, independent women's dreams of how she might improve her existence and that of other women if she were to refuse to allow herself to be exchanged as a marital commodity. It can be thought of as a feminist counterpart to Thomas More's celebrated political essay Utopia (1516). Montesquieu imagines the ideal government as one under female control and the ideal state as one perfectly responsive to women's concerns.

**BIOGRAPHY**

On the scene of eighteenth-century France, the woman referred to by her contemporaries most often simply as Mademoiselle or La Grande Mademoiselle was truly a figure who was larger-than-life. Beginning with her birth at the Louvre, on May 29, 1627, her entire existence was played out as public spectacle. Virtually from the start, the foremost question on her contemporaries' minds was the choice of her future husband. Debate on this issue was especially intense upon the birth of the future Louis XIV in 1638, his mother, Anne of Austria, apparently suggested that the two cousins might one day marry. Commentators usually dismiss this possibility as little more than a joke. The fact remains, however, that it continued to be repeated, virtually until 1660 and the king's marriage, the event that initiated the correspondence edited here.

Beginning in 1644 when Montesquieu was seventeen and Philip IV of Spain became a widower, other candidates began to appear on the scene.

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1. Vincent Pittoresca, Montesquieu's rule of his inheritance and its sources in La Grande Mademoiselle at the Court of France, 1627-1633 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 263-68. He estimates that the capital value of her assets was about 11 million livres, whereas the average fortune of a royal prince of the day was only 4 million livres. Only the Condé princes had greater wealth (266).

2. Montesquieu owe the names by which his contemporaries referred to her to a curious practice that first began to function at the court of France in her day and that was maintained until the Revolution of 1789. In this naming system, the brother of the king was known simply as Montesquieu. (Montesquieu's father, Gaston d'Orléans, was the first royal brother to be so known; contemporary references almost never mention his titles and speak only of Montesquieu.) Daughters of the king were called Mademoiselle with their given name—Madame Elisabeth—and so forth. The royal niece, daughter of Montesquieu, became the first member of the court to be known simply as Mademoiselle, the title stuck for the first eighteen years of her life, as long as she was Montesquieu's only daughter. Once he had other daughters by his second wife, she was referred to more often as La Grande Mademoiselle. When they mention the second name, contemporary commentators all explain that it was a reference to her standing and was not intended as a reference to Montesquieu's exceptional height—although everyone adds that she was remarkably tall, in particular for a woman of her day. She apparently first became known as La Grande Mademoiselle when the second man to be called Montesquieu, Louis XIV's brother Philippe d'Anjou, wanted his eldest daughter to be known as Mademoiselle. Rather than follow seventeenth-century court custom, I refer to Anne-Marie Louise d'Orléans, duchesse de Montesquieu, as Montesquieu. Male nobles of her day are now known by an abbreviated version of their titles. Thus, François, duc de la Rochefoucauld, is today referred to as La Rochefoucauld. There is no reason why we should maintain, as French literary history continues to do, a separate onomastic code for his female contemporaries.
such as the Holy Roman Emperor, Ferdinand III, who was also widowed at about this time. No possible alliance was more seriously or more often proposed than that with Charles Stuart, future King Charles II of England, who joined his mother Henrietta Maria in her exile in France in 1646. All the proposed alliances failed to materialize for a variety of reasons: the emperor, for example, settled on another choice. Nevertheless, beginning with the possibility of a Stuart alliance, it becomes evident that the politics of marriage were shaping the young duchess's character. With Charles Stuart, we have the first example of a phenomenon recurrent during the next years of Montpensier's life: the match did not come off because she herself was against it. She quickly understood the attraction of her immense wealth for an impoverished exile dreaming of recapturing the English throne. She just as quickly concluded that the cost of that dream might prove prohibitive, that the carefully accumulated Montpensier assets could well be devaluated in the process. In this way, the notion of personally taking control over her fate first became a reality for Montpensier.

Then, as of late 1648, another type of history came to dominate French political life so thoroughly that would-be alliances were suddenly sidelined. From the beginning, Montpensier was an eyewitness to the unfolding of the Fronde, the civil war that polarized French society until 1653. The Fronde was an unusually complicated uprising, during which various factions, all of which were allegedly united in their opposition—if not always specifically to the Crown, at least to royal authority in the person of the king's representative, Prime Minister Mazarin—sometimes reinforced but more often undermined one another's efforts. Certainly, the different factions never managed to work together in the way that would have been necessary for their cause to be successful. Any civil war profoundly destabilizes a society, making many things impossible, but at the same time making possible things that would never otherwise have taken place. Among the least expected consequences of the Fronde was surely the fact that during those tumultuous years, women from the highest ranks of the nobility participated in military actions to a degree unheard of in France before or since.

Among them, three duchesses—the duchesse de Chevreuse, the duchesse de Longueville, and the duchesse de Montpensier—were by far the most visible, all three rode at the head of armies and played key strategic roles. Their military daring was so striking that their contemporaries referred to them as Amazonas, as though they were the legendary women warriors come to life. Thus, Montpensier managed to enter the city of Orléans by battering down the only gate no one had thought to fortify and thereby won that city over to the rebel cause. Later, in an exploit that quickly became the stuff of legend, in July 1652 she gave the rebels, known as fondeurs, their final victory. The battle was raging throughout the streets of Paris between the vastly outnumbered opposition forces, led by their finest general, the prince de Condé, and the royal army, under the command of their leading general, Turenne. Louis XIV and Mazarin were watching from high ground just outside Paris, awaiting the seemingly inevitable massacre—when Montpensier issued orders to turn the cannon of the Bastille, which normally faced inward on the city, against the royal forces. Condé and the rebels were saved. And, as it to make certain that her first cousin the king would know who was responsible for his defeat, Montpensier—in this case, every inch the "grande Mademoiselle"—dominated the scene from the towers of the Bastille; she even added a large hat and long plumes to make her already notable stature more impressive still and guaranteed that she would be visible from a great distance.

We do not know exactly how the great fondeurs dressed when they led troops into battle. (When they were traveling incognito, fleeing the enemy, they often wore men's clothing.) Near the time of the Fronde and even much later in life, when Montpensier sat for portraits, she had herself represented in a quite dazzling mix of attire. Witness, for example, the portrait, clearly from her fondeur period, by Charles and Henri Bouchardon (fig. 1). On the one hand, she cuts a stylish, even a glamorous figure, as if ready to take part in court festivities: she wears sweeping, diaphanous garments, an elaborately plumed hat, and magnificent, luminous pearls. On the other, she is also prepared for battle, since she carries both a shield and a lance and, artfully camouflaged by the swirls of lush fabric, she wears a breastplate (although it is hard to imagine how a breastplate so low-slung could have done much good). 3

As he stood at the king's side during Montpensier's ultimate rebellion, the episode at the Bastille, Mazarin is reported to have remarked that when she redirected the cannon, she "killed" her husband—that is, any chance that might have remained for that much-discussed marriage with Louis XIV. In fact, she had killed her chances for much more than that. By October Louis was once again firmly in control of his capital. Among his first initiatives, upon regaining power, the king ordered all the rebel leaders into exile, thus it was that Montpensier found herself forcibly removed from the court, from public life, and from a chance at any alliance sponsored by the king. She would only be allowed to return to court in 1657, by which point—in a period in which aristocratic women generally married before they turned

3 A 1672 portrait, now at Versailles, by Pierre Bouquet, still uses court fashion and battle dress although in a more traditional, allegorical vein (see fig. 2).
twenty, and often much sooner—at age thirty, she had become a decidedly less attractive commodity.

Montpensier chose as the site of her exile one of her properties she had never before laid eyes on, the château at Saint-Fargeau. The years she spent in compulsory isolation from the place those of her rank considered the center of the universe were hardly wasted; she developed new interests, architecture in particular, when she had the dilapidated château remodeled to her specifications. She surrounded herself with a true miniature court; she had the latest plays staged for her followers; she organized all the activities typical of contemporary court life—from dancing to hunting. Most important of all, by the time her exile had ended, she had discovered a literary talent,
By the end of her four years of political exile, Montpensier had become the woman we find in her correspondence with Françoise Bertaut de Motteville: someone who had thought a great deal about whether it was essential to live at her society's political and cultural center. Someone who had come to understand that it was important to her own sense of self not only to witness the unfolding of history, but also to bear witness to this process in writing. Thus, her memoirs—a canny blend of the narration of key events, the Fronde in particular, and personal reaction to those events—open with a detailed account of the process that had led her to shift her energies from the battlefield to the writing table.

In the past, I had great difficulty imagining how anyone who was used to the court and born into the rank I was given at birth could occupy her mind, if she were reduced to living in the country. It had always seemed to me that nothing could take one's mind off things when one had been forced to leave [the court] and that, for great nobles, to find oneself outside the court meant to be completely alone. However, since I have retired to my estate, I have been very happy to realize that...this time spent in seclusion is far from the least agreeable period of my life. One finds there the leisure one needs to put things into writing...[C. 1:1–2, P. 40–367, B. 1:21]

When Montpensier was finally allowed to return to court in the summer of 1657, she was thus a very different person from the politically rebellious princess who had gone into exile with such trepidation. She quickly gave

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5. Montpensier's memoirs were published only posthumously, initially in 1718, in an incomplete edition, next in 1728, in the first complete publication. This time lag is in no way sur-

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6. The various editions of Montpensier's memoirs follow different manuscripts and are not always reliably. Adolphe Chemel's 1858–59 edition (4 vols., Paris: G. Charpentier) is by far the best. Claude Pericot's 1824–25 edition (4 vols., Paris: Fouchet) is the next best. Christian Boyer recently reissued Chemel's text (2 vols., Paris: Libraire Fontaine, 1985). Since none of these editions is widely available, when I cite Montpensier's Mémoires I provide references to all three editions (labeled "C," "P," and "B"). I have slightly altered Montpensier's vocabulary in the passage just cited because the words she uses as synonyms for "exile"—"retirement," "retreat"—both have such different connotations today. In seventeenth-century French, these words—along with "repos" and "desert"—were used to mean political exile, they also signified, as in the case in the opening paragraphs of Montpensier's memoirs, all the positive aspects of life away from the agitation of court life. On this vocabulary and its uses, see Donna Stanton, "The Ideal of Repos in Seventeenth-Century French Literature," L'Esprit créateur 15, nos. 1–2 (spring–summer 1975), 79–104.
official notification of that difference with her decision to leave the court again soon thereafter, this time of her own volition, for another of her estates, Champigny-sur-Veude. There, she turned her attention once again to literary pursuits; she began work on a project she later continued at Saint-Fargeau, a collective volume entitled *Divers portraits* that she had privately published in January 1659.

*Divers portraits* gathers together fifty-nine verbal portraits and self-portraits, of which Montpensier herself contributed seventeen. These are biographical and autobiographical explorations of the most famous court figures of the day. It marked an important moment in the development of the modern novel: the emphasis on interiority and character development that characterizes these portraits soon became the trademark of the new French prose fiction. In addition, the volume can be seen as a collective statement, for it—along with two subsequent, more extensive collections, which had wider circulation—launched a number of literary careers. *Divers portraits* contains, for example, the first published work of the woman destined to compose *La Princesse de Clèves*, known as the first modern novel: Lafayette. Lafayette contributed to the collection the portrait of her lifelong best friend, Marie de Rabutin-Chantal, marquise de Sévigné, whose letters would become the most celebrated of the entire French tradition. A number of those published in these compilations were, like La Rochefoucauld, former leaders of the Fronde; others were, like Sévigné and Lafayette, members of *fondant* families. When Montpensier launched the vogue for literary portraiture, it was as if she were indicating a redeployment of forces, those who had formerly actively participated in court politics would now pay written testimony to the psychology of their age.

While the portrait collections were still appearing, for the first time since her exile, Montpensier was called upon to take an active role in court life. During the early months of 1660, all the central members of the court were traveling, heading for a royal wedding. The twenty-two-year-old king was getting married to the Infanta of Spain, and their two countries, after having been at war for years, were to sign a peace treaty. A double ceremony was planned: the ceremony on Spanish soil on June 3, that in France on June 9. The court proceeded to the border with Spain in stately fashion, with extended stays along the way. Shortly after they reached their destination of Saint-Jean-de-Luz on May 8, against the backdrop of the ultimate marriage as political alliance, Montpensier records in her memoirs that she initiated first conversations and then a correspondence with Motteville on what she called "the project of a solitary way of life for individuals who would agree to leave the court"—and agree never to marry (C. 3:452, P. 42:490, B. 2:146). Thus was born Montpensier's utopian vision for a community in which women would be mistresses of their fates and their property.

The first letter is dated May 14, two and a half weeks before the royal nuptials, but also less than two weeks shy of Montpensier's thirty-third birthday. Surely everyone present at Saint-Jean-de-Luz realized that her value as a marital commodity was rapidly dwindling. Certainly, by this point Montpensier had come to think of marriage as an institution that was most often highly disadvantageous to women. The paragraph preceding her account of the correspondence's origin is devoted to the marriage of Princess Marguerite de Savoie with the duke of Parme. Montpensier describes the "little sovereign" as a "dishonest man" with only one "passion": shoeing horses. She considered him unworthy of such a bride and suggests that the princess's destiny proves this point: "She did not survive this shame for long; she died shortly thereafter." Montpensier concludes that "she should never have married" (C. 3:452, P. 42:489, B. 3:146). During the protracted wedding festivities, the royal first cousin thus played a double role: in public, she was a key member of the French delegation, acting out every move of the complicated ceremonial role expected of her, at the same time as, in private, she was penning a violent protest against the institution of marriage as it functioned in her day.

In the aftermath of his marriage, Louis XIV set about firming up his control over his kingdom. He most definitely did not intend to lose the potential for negotiation represented by the vast Montpensier domain and thus proposed a final series of alliances to his ever-more recalcitrant cousin. Letter 5 of her correspondence with Motteville, written the year after the royal marriage, portrays Montpensier as caught between a woman's traditional obligation to her family and her newfound sense of obligation to herself; it also proves her continued conviction, initially expressed on the eve of the royal nuptials in her third letter, that marriage was a form of "slavery" for women (see p. 49). In the years immediately following the king's marriage, Montpensier refused several matches proposed to her by Louis XIV: when she rejected his proposal of King Alfonso VI of Portugal—described by the French envoy in Lisbon as both a stupid drunkard and physically repellant—the king was so displeased that he exiled her once again to Saint-Fargeau. Montpensier returned to the court definitively in 1664, although she was never again as active a participant in its life as she had once been.

At this point, Montpensier seemed destined to live out her life just as she wanted, according to the dreams laid out in the correspondence published
in this volume. Then, suddenly in 1670, the unthinkable happened. Mademoiselle, La Grande Mademoiselle, the king's first cousin and the wealthiest woman in France—fell in love. In her case, love appears to have been even more than usually blind.

According to every rule of the contemporary marriage game, the man she finally decided on was hardly her equal. Antonin Nompar de Caumont, marquis de Puyguilhem, was the third son of the comte de Lauzun, a title he had inherited upon his father's death in 1668. By birth, Lauzun was therefore in no way worthy of a member of the royal family, in addition, he was virtually penniless.

Happily, Montpensier's strange choice turned into a great love match, their union could be celebrated today as the most striking example of a phenomenon documented by historian Carolyn Lougee. During the second half of the seventeenth century, a new view of marriage was promoted both in contemporary novels and in the important seventeenth-century tradition of writing that we now call feminist, a tradition that, in particular, called for equality between the sexes. Marriage was a matter of personal choice and should be based on love, rather than obligation to one's family, a man's personal merit, rather than his social standing or family fortune, should determine a woman's choice of husband. Lougee shows how that view inspired a significant number of women actually to reject all the marital conventions operative in their day and to forge unions with men very clearly their social inferiors. Indeed, as Lougee documents, seventeenth-century France witnessed "a formal celebration of such misalliances." This new type of marriage, based on romantic love and personal merit rather than social standing, was so threatening in Montpensier's day that it contributed to the increasingly widespread opinion that French women with intellectual pretensions, those known in their day as précieuses, were deliberately seeking to destabilize French society.

What Montpensier clearly saw as her only chance for happiness within the institution of marriage, marriage revised according to contemporary feminist ideals, was not, however, destined to end, as other contemporary unions apparently did, in storybook fashion. The king at first agreed to the match.

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on December 15, 1670. and Montpensier had already begun, on December 17, the process of raising Lauzun to a more appropriate rank by transferring some of her titles to his name, when her cousin changed his mind and, on December 18, rescinded his permission. A year later the king had Lauzun arrested and imprisoned for ten years in a distant and gloomy fortress at Pignan. (Louis never justified the arrest, but it seems to have been intended to put an end to Lauzun and Montpensier's protests over his decision to end their engagement.) The king could not have foreseen that Lauzun's captivity would provide in the long run the solution to the problem so many had been seeking to solve for so long, that of gaining control over Montpensier's lands.

In order to ransom him, she was forced to give up huge territories—in particular the earldom of Eu and Dombes, an independent principality that had become part of France only in 1762, which she was obliged to sign over to the duc du Maine, the illegitimate son of Louis XIV and Madame de Montespan.

Lauzun was thus allowed to return to Paris. The couple may have been secretly married, though no one is sure that a wedding actually did take place. More important is the fact that the beloved whose freedom she had purchased at such great expense was apparently never even minimally convincing in his declarations of love; he also seems to have paid too much attention to other women. Montpensier, finally simply sent him away, thereby putting a highly unromantic end to her great romance. She continued to work on her memoirs and lived out the last decade of her life quietly at her various estates and, at the end, in the convent of Saint-Séverin in Paris, where she died on April 5, 1693, at age sixty-five.

The folly of Montpensier's choice of Lauzun even today completely distorts the manner in which her biography is usually presented. This one episode is almost invariably put at the center of her life, and virtually all her biographers seem to leap on every occasion to have a laugh at her expense. A great deal is lost because of this distortion. In particular, Montpensier's considerable contributions to the realignment of French literature that took place in the second half of the seventeenth century have been all but forgotten. And the remarkable voice heard in the correspondence that follows, one of the most overtly "feminist" voices of early modern France, has all too rarely been heard.

THE CORRESPONDENCE

In her Mémoires Montpensier carefully records the genesis of these letters. It all began with a conversation with her friend Motteville that took place in
Saint-Jean-de-Luz while they were awaiting the royal nuptials. Montpensier, standing at a window gazing out at the Pyrenees, initiated a discussion with Motteville about what life "in complete solitude" would be like, about how one would live if one were able "to live only for oneself." Montpensier then went for a walk along the beach, during which she had the idea for "a project which seemed so extraordinary to me" that she "ran back to her lodgings, took up pen and paper," and immediately dashed off the first letter. Motteville answered, and they continued to exchange letters "over the next year or two" and to develop their plan to establish a community in which a group of noblemen and, above all, noblewomen would live together. "Free from the weariness [today we might say 'burnout'] of life at court," creating a world in which marriage and even courtship were banned (C. 3: 452-54, P. 4: 490-91, B. 2: 146-47). From their letters we learn that what Montpensier called "solitude" meant not living alone, but living away from the court, while "to live for oneself" signified that one had decided not to marry. Her correspondent had her own reasons for sharing Montpensier's aversion to marriage. In 1639, when she was eighteen, Françoise Bertaut—daughter of a lady-in-waiting and friend of Louis XIV's mother, Anne of Austria—had been married off to the ninety-year-old Nicolas Langlois, seigneur de Motteville. This union with a wealthy magistrate was considered a good match for the impoverished young woman. Since, however, the marriage had produced no children and the young wife had failed to have any of her husband's assets transferred to her name, she found herself once again in strained circumstances when she was widowed after only two years of marriage. She was saved from an obligatory second marriage when Anne of Austria, now queen regent, brought her back to court as her lady-in-waiting. Motteville remained in her service, gathering all the while firsthand information on the intrigues of the court, until the queen's death in 1666. From then until her own death in 1689, she lived very quietly in Paris, without contact with the world of influence in which she had spent her entire early life. Of those years we know little, other than that she kept up friendships with literary women, in particular Sévigné and Lafayette. It was then that she put to use her vast knowledge of French political life, when she wrote her Mémoires pour servir à l'Histoire d'Anne d'Autriche, épouse de Louis XIII, roi de France. 8

Motteville also had her own reasons for sharing Montpensier's other aversion, to life at court; she and her mother had been sent away from court by Richelieu in 1631. From then on she never attempted to play any role more active than that of discreet and disinterested observer of the political scene. Even the memoirs composed at the end of her life, unlike most accounts of the civil war period in France, were those of a passive witness: they are centered not on her personal role, but on Anne of Austria's presence. Motteville played a similar role in her correspondence with Montpensier: she is the ideal sounding board, although she proposes modifications to Montpensier's project, she always makes it clear that Mademoiselle's word is law. Montpensier was clearly the creator of this feminocentric utopia.

Motteville's memoirs contain a decidedly jaundiced view of what she calls "the climate of that country known as the court":

The air there is gentle and serene for no one... It is a dark zone, full of constant storms. Those who live there... are always ill from that contagious disease, ambition, which deprives them of peace and eats away at their heart... This malady also inspires them a disgust for all the best things in life... its sweetness, its innocent pleasures, everything that the wise men of antiquity held in esteem. 9

The chance encounter at Saint-Jean-de-Luz thus threw together two women all too ready to imagine that life away from that "dark country known as the court" could be an idyllic experience, a bucolic retreat sheltered from all the "maladies" of their age.

The life Montpensier imagines for her subjects is reminiscent of the tradition of pastoral poetry that dates back to such classical precursors as Virgil: they will live in harmony with nature, they will dress as shepherdesses, and some of them will even watch over their flocks. Obvious literary references should not, however, fool us into believing that Montpensier intended that her project be absolutely timeless. She calls their community a "Republican," a word the correspondents repeat almost incessantly. That term alone makes us realize that the government of her ideal community would be kinder and gentler than her country's monarchy.

The simple fact that Montpensier would have reigned as "sovereign" over their republic also says a great deal: she thereby appropriates for herself a measure of the power that could have been hers in a state without Salic law, the legal code that prevented French princesses from succeeding to the

8. Motteville's memoirs, once again, were published only in 1723, in the decade following Louis XIV's death. The most readily available edition is in vols. 36-40 of the series Collection des mémoires relatifs à l'Histoire de France, ed. Claude Petitot (Paris: Fouquet, 1824-29).

9. This passage, from the first version of Motteville's memoirs—the manuscript of which is found at the Arsenal Library—is not included in all published texts. Petitot cites it in his introduction (36: 313-15).
La Grande Mademoiselle

La Côte de Mademoiselle

The political framework of Montpensier's utopia thus shows us that her project also shares an affinity with a more modern tradition of pastoral literature. From the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, writers all over Europe found the pastoral mode, with its trappings of shepherds and their life of simple innocence, a convenient vehicle for masking political statements that could otherwise have seemed subversive. Montpensier was naturally well aware of contemporary pastoral literature—witness the prominent reference in her first letter to Honoré d'Urfé's Astre (1607-27), by far the most celebrated French pastoral novel. At the same time, however, she takes exception most violently to the principal pastime in d'Urfé's pastoral fantasy: courtship and romantic love. Seventeenth-century readers would have understood that she was thereby aligning herself with the philosophy of a very particular and today far less known contemporary tradition of utopian writing, one in which a series of French women writers imagined lands or societies under female control. Whether these imaginary realms were situated in ancient Rome or on the plains of Central Asia, whenever women writers imagined countries governed by women, their government was based on two rules: friendship was more important than love, and marriage was either outlawed altogether or else completely redefined so that married women would be legally independent from their husbands.

In this tradition Montpensier's best known precursor was Madeleine de Scudéry, whose novels contain two of the most memorable of these utopias. The final volume of Acte VIII, le Grand Cyrus, published in 1653, features the realm of the Saurmates (according to Herodotus, the land of the Amazons), founded by a group of people exiled after a civil war. It is governed by a queen, and its courts grant legal status to unions outside of marriage, since the society's founding credo, articulated by the volume's central character, Sapho, is that marriage is, in legal terms, "a long slavery" for women. 10


A few years later, in the sixth volume of her next novel, Côte de Mademoiselle, published in 1658, Scudéry tells the story of "illustrious recluse" ("Illustres solitaires") who, tired of "all the world's vanity," have decided to create their own "small world" within "the large one" in order to be able to live in peace. They share a common conviction that friendship is infinitely superior to love (6:1138-45). 12

Montpensier's contemporaries would thus have recognized the literary context in which she situated her project. Its obvious literary antecedents, and in particular the air of unreality that the pastoral context lends the project—who can really imagine for an instant that the wealthiest woman in Europe would devote herself to watching over a flock of sheep?—should not cause us to forget, however, the concrete, practical details that give Montpensier's project its particular character. She has carefully thought out so many aspects of daily life—the view from the windows of the different houses, the means of transportation available to them, even the games they would play for relaxation—that it is at times easy to think that she was writing the blueprint for a community she believed might one day actually be created. The creative energy of the woman who had used her recent exile to transform a remote and desolate countryside into a thriving "ducal" court is everywhere evident. In this regard, we must remember that Montpensier stresses that those who live under her rule will not be exiles, obliged to live in her community. "they will retire from court without having been driven out" (Mémoires 3:453; P.421:90; B.2:146). It is essential to her plan that the new way of life she imagines be freely chosen.

11 I also cite Astre in the only widely available edition of Scudéry's novel, Editions Slavkine reprint of its second edition (10 vols.; Geneva: Editions Slavkine, 1975). Scudéry was widely translated in the seventeenth century, but these translations are not readily available today. The Other Voice: Early Modern Europe series recently published Sapho, edited and translated by Karen Newman, which contains this feministic utopia.

12 I also cite Côte de Mademoiselle in the Slavkine reprint of the novels' second edition (10 vols.; Geneva: Editions Slavkine, 1975). This particular tradition of utopian speculation did not end with Montpensier's project. Two decades later, for example, Antoinette de Salvin, countess of Salvin, began a correspondence with the marquis de Montefeltre in which she developed her plan to found a sect whose members would work to better women's lives—particularly by banishing love from our society lest it should trouble the peace that we are seeking. Their goal was to gain wider acceptance for equality between the sexes, which is no longer questioned among people of quality." Lettres de Madame de Scudéry a Michel de M. Desclères (Paris: Leopold Collin, 1806). 190, 203. In 1704 Salvin de Salvin actually founded an academy, or learned society, based on these principles, it was known as the Chevaliers et Chevalières de la Bonne Fortune (xerox). Throughout the eighteenth century, French women writers—Françoise de Graffigny and Isabelle de Charrière, for example—continued this tradition of utopian speculation.
In 1661 the king celebrated his new independence by beginning work on a project of his own, the reconstruction of Versailles, the château that would come to be seen as the ultimate monument to his absolutism. With Versailles, Louis guaranteed in particular that the principal members of the French aristocracy henceforth would all be kept together in one community and under one roof, perpetually under the king’s surveillance. Nobles would never again gather together out of their monarch’s sight. When she dates her final letter, Montpensier can be seen as signifying her awareness that, just as the days of Amazonian political activity were irrevocably past, it was also too late for the other new dreams for women to which her project stands as a blueprint.

In the manuscript I consulted for this edition, the letters are followed by “The Story of Princessz Adarnize,” a short story three times as long as the correspondence to which it is appended. The fiction’s author is never identified, Motteville explains that she is sending it to Montpensier to show her that she is not the first great princess “who desired the solitary life”: even though Princessz Adarnize lived in ancient Persia, “her life can be compared to [yours].” Indeed, the story that follows—of a princess who chose to live her life far from the court and to establish a republic and a society of nobles to which women flocked since its customs were so much more favorable to them than those established by Persian law—reproduces all the key elements of Montpensier’s utopia.

The story, allegedly translated from Persian by a French scholar, is a very early example of a type of fiction soon to become enormously popular in France and referred to either as an oriental tale or a fairy tale (even though, as is the case here, fairies do not always put in an appearance). In this example the characters do not live “happily ever after”—or at least not in the manner traditional to fairy tales. The emperor of Persia, who has done all he can, despite many rejections, to convince the princess to marry him, is killed. Adarnize lives out her long life—happy and fulfilled—in her feminist republic. 12

Motteville includes the date on which she sent the tale: 1664, the year Montpensier was allowed to return to court after her second exile. It was as if she had decided to use the Persian princess’s story to reinforce Montpensier’s resolution to remain aloof from court life and its marital politics. This seemingly contradictory blend—a fairy tale bearing a historical inscription—is appropriate for Montpensier’s feminocentric utopia, which exists in

12 Because the “fairy tale” is so long and its authorship uncertain, I chose not to translate it for this volume.
Montpensier’s project was progressive in a second way, one closer to our concerns today. All the residences in her republic were to contain both libraries and studies, places in which literary creation could take place. She was sure, moreover, that this would be the case: “I have no doubt that we would have among us some who would also write books,” she announces in her first letter (see p. 31). Like Virginia Woolf nearly three centuries later, Montpensier—who, you will remember, had just used her years of enforced exile to become a published author—clearly understood that “a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction.” She also shared Woolf’s understanding that marriage had traditionally been an obstacle to women’s creativity because upon her marriage a woman lost the legal control over her property.

It is, of course, in a way impossible to compare the sense of economic reality possessed by the wealthiest woman in Europe with Woolf’s modest dreams of a private room and sufficient funds to scrape by on. Yet in the exalted cry with which Montpensier ends her third letter—“let there be a corner of the world in which it can be said that women are their own mistresses . . . . and let us celebrate ourselves for the centuries to come”—we hear precisely the kind of enabling voice that Woolf looked for in the long history of women’s writing. In the end, both realized that spatial independence—the possibility of a place where “women are their own mistresses,” was of the essence if women were to leave a permanent legacy.

When she reflected on this correspondence in her memoirs, Montpensier concluded that “if both sides of the correspondence were gathered together, there would be enough to fill a small volume” (C. 3: 453, P. 42 : 490, B. 2: 147). Nearly three and a half centuries later, this thinly veiled request to make fully public her dreams for all that women might accomplish if they were allowed to rule over “a corner of the world” is at last being answered.

A NOTE ON THE FRENCH TEXT

The title page of the manuscript on which the present edition is based tells us that among Montpensier’s contemporaries, these letters were “famous on account of the acclaim they had received at the court and in Paris.” This


16. “Moreover, if you consider any great figure of the past, like Sappho, like the Lady Murasaki, like Emily Bronte, you will find that she is an inheritor as well as an originator” (Woolf, Room of One’s Own. 113).
indicates that the correspondence circulated widely in manuscript. The first four of these letters have been published several times in volumes that gather together various kinds of letters, first in 1667 and most recently in 1806. All subsequent editions follow the 1667 text. In her Mémoires Montpensier writes that she did not authorize this edition; she adds that the four letters had been so "mangled" that she considered them "ruined" (C. 3:454, P. 42.491, B. 2:147). For this edition I followed the text of a manuscript recently acquired by the Bibliothèque nationale de France, NAF 25670. The manuscript gives a version of the first four letters substantially different from that found in earlier editions. Furthermore, the manuscript contains the text of four additional letters, published here for the first time. We know that the correspondence as published in the 1667 edition was incomplete, in her Mémoires Montpensier says that they exchanged letters "for a year or two" (C. 3:453, P. 42.491, B. 2:146). This corresponds to the time frame of the eight letters found in the Bibliothèque nationale's manuscript, which were written over a period of some fifteen months, and which, unlike the first four letters that end in medias res, form a complete unit.

While the manuscript followed here is not an autograph manuscript, it is in a late-seventeenth-century hand. We know that Montpensier had copies made of her works — her Mémoires, in particular — that she presented to her friends. It is not unlikely that the Bibliothèque nationale's manuscript is one such copy, that it therefore gives us our first access ever to the correspondence as it was written.

The French text published here follows the manuscript almost to the letter. I respected its use of capitals: we know that these were considered a way of emphasizing a word's importance, they are thus a trace of the correspondence's orality, an essential quality in a text whose tone is overwhelmingly conversational. Nothing signals that orality more clearly than the manuscript's punctuation. Both women favor the long, loose sentences typical of the French prose of their day. Readers today, who know seventeenth-century prose only from modern editions — all of which radically modernize its punctuation — may be surprised by their sentences. I suggest reading at least some of the letters aloud to get a sense of the conversational flow and oral qualities of this prose. In the self-portrait she contributed to the portrait collection she edited in 1659, Montpensier remarks, "I write well, freely and in a natural style." In this correspondence the original punctuation brings us closer to that "free, natural style." I made very few changes in the original punctuation, they are indicated by means of brackets. I also standardized two practices irregularly used in the manuscript: capital letters to begin each sentence and commas around forms of address such as "illustrious princess."

A NOTE ON THE TRANSLATION

In the English translation, I modified the highly oral style of this correspondence in one major way: by breaking down many of the very long sentences into shorter units. I often inserted a sentence break where an extended phrase in the French text begins with a "but", in these cases I usually changed the "but" to a "however." Otherwise, I tried to preserve as much of the rhythm of their exchange as possible.

18. Vita Sackville-West includes a translation of Montpensier's self-portrait in her highly readable and informative biography, Daughters of France: The Life of La Grande Mademoiselle (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1959), 177-78. Christian Bouyer gives the French text in a recent edition of part of her portrait collection: Anne-Marie Louise d'Orléans, duchesse de Montpensier, Portraits Libres, ed. Christian Bouyer (Paris: Séguret, 2000), 23-27. See Cholakian, Women and the Politics of Self-Representation, 67, for a discussion of the "conversational style" of the autograph manuscript of Montpensier's Memoirs and the manner in which this style was made more conventional in the manuscript as copied by her secretary.

17. For an explanation of why many editors are now reproducing the use of capitals in early modern publications, see Roger Chartier, Publishing Drama in Early Modern Europe (London: British Museum, 1999), 20. On the manner in which the original punctuation of seventeenth-century prose contributes to its oral quality, see Bernard Bray's edition of Tristan l'Hermite's Êtymologies (Paris: Monnier Champion, 1999), 170.