A Women’s Republic of Letters: Anna Maria van Schurman, Marie de Gournay, and Female Self-Representation in Relation to the Public Sphere

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In the study of early modern women writers’ participation in transnational networks of epistolary exchange, a remarkable example is the one centered on the polyglot Anna Maria van Schurman (1607–1678). One of the most famous erudite women in Europe and the most celebrated in the Protestant world, Schurman corresponded with many women, with whom she established a commonality of purpose and a sense of community. She addressed letters both to the well-known—such as the Huguenot Princess Anne de Rohan (1584–1646), Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia (1618–1689), and the latter’s sister Sophie von der Pfalz (1630–1714), later Electress of Hanover—and to the relatively obscure—such as a Madame de Coutel, who shared her interest in portraiture, and Anne de Merveil, Dowager of Prosting. The concept of a respublica litteraria mulierum (a women’s Republic of Letters) emerges strongly from Schurman’s letters and poems addressed to her peers in other lands.

In France, during the first part of the seventeenth century, three notable contemporaries of Schurman, Marie le Jars de Gournay (1565–1645), Anne de Rohan, and Madeleine de Scudéry (1607–1701), either entertained an epistolary exchange with her or knew her work firsthand. In the second half of the century, Schurman continued to be admired for her erudition, knowledge of languages, defense of women’s higher education, and modesty: Madame de Motteville (1615–1689), in a letter written in 1660 to Anne-Marie-Louise d’Orléans (1627–1693), Duchesse
de Montpensier, praised Schurman along with Elisabeth of Bohemia, Catherine de Sainte-Maure, Comtesse de Brassac, and Madeleine de Scudéry; their “knowledge,” she states, “did not take away their modesty and the gentleness that befits our sex.” The bio-bibliographers Jacquette Guillaume and Marguerite Buffet included Schurman in their catalogues of contemporary intellectual women.

Of particular interest to this study are Schurman’s views of the women intellectuals with whom she corresponded, as well as their understanding of and influences on her. These views are linked to the concepts of imitation and mimesis which are central in Renaissance exemplarity, whether male or female. Exemplarity assumed two slightly differing forms, one based on the lives of illustrious figures taken from the Christian past and Roman moral philosophers, and the other on conduct books containing examples to follow or avoid in the conduct of daily life. The first form, leading to the genre of the “femmes illustres,” is found in Boccaccio’s De mulieribus claris (On Famous Women), which played a crucial role in the querelle des femmes. Boccaccio’s use of the exemplary biography facilitated revisionist arguments on the nature of women. The second form of exemplarity, as illustrated in Juan-Luis Vives’s De institutione feminae Christianae (The Education of a Christian Woman), proposed models of good women applicable to everyday life. Both forms reinforced the conventional female virtues of silence, chastity, and obedience, which were viewed as complementary to male virtues. As Ian Maclean points out, moralists of the period argued that “male and female capacity for virtue in genere is different, and that they [men and women] should practice different virtues, which are complementary in character (silence, eloquence; obedience, command).”

These forms of exemplarity, however, are problematic for a woman writer. The illustrious female exemplars from antiquity are too remote, and the conventional virtues, silence especially, cannot inspire nor adequately guide. In seeking models for her life as a humanist scholar, Anna Maria van Schurman turned, instead, to the women with whom she corresponded. In this she followed a trend among women writers of the early modern period, who started to claim each other as models in the fashioning of their lives as writers. This was a relatively new phenomenon that began in the sixteenth century with the growing number of women writing, circulating
their manuscripts, and publishing. Rather than limiting themselves to models in the compendia of illustrious women and conduct books, they referred to each other as would-be models and guides.

An examination of Anna Maria van Schurman’s writings about and correspondence with Marie de Gournay is particularly interesting in that both women at first glance are more different than alike. Gournay was forty years older than Schurman, of a different nationality, and Catholic. Gournay was at the end of her career, while Schurman was beginning her ascendancy in the Republic of Letters as a gifted linguist and prodigy of learning. As will be seen, their views of each other are both positive and negative, admiring and critical. What did they share in common? In what ways did they admire each other, how were they critical, and how were they models for each other as thinkers and writers?

This study examines the circumstances surrounding the epistolary relationship between Schurman and Gournay, the literary affiliation that Gournay proposed, and their views of and influences on each other in their parallel quests for ways to depict a woman writer’s self in relation to the literary public sphere.

Anna Maria van Schurman’s Writings about and Correspondence with Marie de Gournay

The humanist writer Marie le Jars de Gournay was well-known to scholars in the Low Countries and the Dutch Republic. Justus Lipsius wrote that she should consider him as her brother; the son of the Leiden historiographer Daniel Heinsius declared that she had entered into a combat with men and vanquished them; the polymath Hugo Grotius translated some of her verses; and Dominicus Baudius referred to her as the “French Siren” and the “Tenth Muse.” She was especially appreciated as the editor of Montaigne’s essays, which were eagerly read in Leiden’s and Amsterdam’s intellectual circles.

Gournay gained Schurman’s respect and admiration by virtue of her life-long battle to legitimize women writers and women’s education. Gournay also represented for Schurman an unusual contemporary
example of a professional writer who had refused marriage to live an independent life of letters in Paris.13 Schurman, too, had refused to marry and instead devoted herself to a life of faith, piety, and learning.

Gournay appears in three different ways in Schurman’s printed œuvre: in a brief Latin epideictic poem, in two Latin letters on women’s education addressed to the French Calvinist theologian André Rivet (1572–1651), and in her French correspondence with Gournay. In each case, Gournay is cast not as Montaigne’s editor, but as an illustrious defender of the cause of women’s learning. Schurman had read Gournay’s treatise L’Égalité des hommes et des femmes (The Equality of Men and Women, 1622) and the shorter Le Grief des dames (The Ladies’ Complaint, 1626) which had appeared in Gournay’s collected works, L’Ombre de la demoiselle de Gournay (The Shadow of Mademoiselle de Gournay, 1626) and was re-edited twice in Les Adviz, ou, Les Presens de la Demoiselle de Gournay (The Opinions, or the Gifts of Mademoiselle de Gournay, 1634, 1641). The second (1634) edition of Gournay’s collected works was published in the precise time period that Schurman was reflecting on the controversial issue of female education. André Rivet, who had become Schurman’s mentor, may have provided her with an introduction to Gournay.14

The three ways in which Gournay is either mentioned or directly addressed reveal Schurman’s views of her. First, in her Latin poem, Schurman likens Gournay to an Amazon warrior fighting for the cause of women:

Anna Maria van Schurman congratulates
The great and noble-minded heroine of Gournay,
Strong defender of the cause of our sex.
You bear the arms of Pallas, bold heroine in battles,
And so that you may carry the laurels, you bear the arms of Pallas.
Thus it is fitting for you to make a defense for the innocent sex
And turn the weapons of harmful men against them.
Lead on, glory of Gournay, we shall follow your standard,
For in you our cause advances, which is mightier than strength.15

Gournay is characterized as a virago filled with the spirit of war and as a great and noble-minded heroine.16 To illustrate Gournay’s fighting “virile”
mind, Schurman declares twice in chiasmic form her heroine’s allegiance to Pallas Athena: “You bear the arms of Pallas, bold heroine in battle; / And so that you may carry the laurels, you bear the arms of Pallas.” Schurman notes that Gournay has earned her place in history: the latter does battle with the written word and carries the “laurels,” a reference to both military victory and poetic immortality. In her writings Gournay, as advocate of her sex, has turned rhetorical weapons, once exclusively male possessions, against “harmful men.” The poem ends in a resounding call to follow Gournay beneath her banner, for in her “our cause advances.”

The cause to which Schurman refers is the advancement of women’s education that she herself had strongly advocated in Latin, French, and Dutch poems penned to commemorate the inauguration of the University of Utrecht in 1634, the year of the publication of the second edition of Gournay’s collected works. In these poems, Schurman has Pallas Athena as titular goddess of higher learning demanding the admission of young female students into the halls of the University of Utrecht. Gournay’s proto-feminist treatises likely influenced Schurman to voice such a radical call, for Gournay as well upheld the ideal of an intellectually integrated community of letters transcending gender lines in which women were accepted on the basis of intellectual merit.

Second, Gournay’s advocacy for women’s learning is referred to in two Latin letters on the topic of women’s education that Schurman addressed to her mentor, André Rivet. Schurman wrote these letters at the same time that she penned her laudatory verses to Gournay between November 1637 and March 1638. Like Gournay, she criticizes those who state that “pulling the needle and distaff is an ample enough school for women,” thereby echoing her French peer’s indictment in her *Equality of Men and Women* of those who limit women’s sphere to the “distaff, yea, to the distaff alone.” And like Gournay, Schurman argues that such a “received custom” is an artificial construct because countless ancient authorities “demonstrate the contrary, as she who is the noblest glory of the Gournay family shows with both wit and learning in the little book that she entitiled *The Equality of Men and Women.*”

Schurman, in her reply to Rivet’s critique of her arguments, reiterates her appreciation for Gournay’s *Equality of Men and Women* even though, she
states, she cannot approve of all its aspects: “Just as, on the basis of its elegance and wit, I can by no means disapprove of the little dissertation of the most noble Gournay On the Equality of Men and Women, at the same time I would certainly not dare nor would I want to approve of it in all things.”

What in particular would she not have approved and what would she have endorsed? Just prior to citing Gournay’s work, Schurman defends herself against Rivet’s accusation that she is claiming the superiority of women. She rejects this criticism on grounds of “maidenly modesty” and “innate shyness” and notes that it “troubled” her to read “that otherwise outstanding treatise by Lucrezia Marinella, to which she gave the title The Nobility and Excellence of Women, along with the Defects and Deficiencies of Men.”

By juxtaposing Gournay with Marinella, Schurman indicates that she disagrees with the more radical aspects of their defenses of women. As for her approval of Gournay, in her previous letter to Rivet, she had called attention to Gournay’s listing of the “testimony of the wise authorities” in The Equality of Men and Women; these authorities include Plato, Socrates, Seneca, the Church Fathers, Montaigne, and the Scriptures. In stating anew her appreciation for Gournay, she underscores the legitimacy of Gournay’s defense of women’s learning by specifically approving her citation of classical and biblical sources. On account of her humanist training, Gournay advocated that knowledge of the ancients was the best way for a woman writer to show her intellectual acumen and that only through erudition could she participate in an aristocracy of the mind reserved for what she called “great women and great men.”

By engaging in erudition, women could rival men in the Republic of Letters.

Last, Gournay and Schurman corresponded with each other. Gournay, however, not only praised Schurman; she also took the liberty of critiquing her. In an unpublished manuscript letter dated October 20, 1639, Gournay begins by thanking Schurman for her epideictic poem. She then comes to the main point of her missive:

Dare I in passing tell you philosophically a word from my limited perspective: languages take an inordinate and too long a time for a mind as capable of matters, and of the best, as yours; nor is it useful for you to say, as you do, that you want to read the Originals in every case because their translated versions are not worthy of them.
In this highly revelatory exchange, Gournay presses Schurman on two issues: the most beneficial way for her to spend her time, and whether a translation is in fact inferior, as Schurman supposes, to the source text. Additionally, Gournay may be implying that the amount of time that Schurman spends on translation works to the detriment of her own writing in becoming a published author. She advises her younger counterpart to focus only on Latin and Greek texts, to which she can add with little effort works in Italian, Spanish, and especially the French language that Montaigne's essays “have made necessary for the whole world.”26 Gournay draws attention here to the increasing popularity of French as the lingua franca of politics and among the European elite. She pointedly omits Hebrew, which she thought should be reserved only for specialists whose profession necessitated its acquisition.27 In critiquing Schurman, she is likely censuring the Dutch scholar's pious orthodoxy which, as a skeptical disciple of Montaigne, she may have found excessive. Gournay ends her letter by stating that, should she live several more years, she would send the Dutch scholar a new printing of her collected works, the *Advis*, “where your name will be included.”28

Schurman opens her reply to Gournay, written three months later in early 1640, with a reference to her epideictic poem in which she has “testified” to “the advantages that your [Gournay’s] heroic virtues have procured for your sex.”29 She reveals how moved she is at Gournay’s promise to mention her in her 1641 edition of the *Advis* and writes that Gournay has given her “the hope that my name will one day be consecrated to immortality by the favor of your Muse”; she adds, “I imagine by a sweet dream that the marks of your affection, which will here be read no doubt, will not be less glorious [for me] than the honor of a praise that I might have merited.”30 Admittedly, Schurman’s allusion to Gournay bestowing literary glory on her is part of the rhetorical *captatio benevolentiae* (the seizing of goodwill).31 However, it is clear from this letter that Schurman, whose reputation in the Republic of Letters was growing, was not averse to having her name linked to Gournay’s. Finally, touching on Gournay’s criticism of her study of oriental and Semitic languages, she argues that she does so only in her leisure time and then only rarely: “With regard to your opinion that I occupy myself too much with the study of languages, I can assure
you that I contribute only my leisure hours to them and sometimes after rather long gaps of time, if you permit me to make an exception of the sacred language.” She insists on making an exception for Hebrew: she argues that no translation is capable of expressing “so well the simplicity and dignity of these Holy Mysteries” and that the use of Hebrew “(according to the feeling of the most learned) will endure into the next life.”

A Mother-Daughter Alliance

Marie de Gournay was to write at least one more known letter to Schurman, which has since been lost. This we learn from a passage in a manuscript Latin letter from Schurman to Rivet written eight months after Schurman’s last reply to Gournay. Schurman describes receiving a request from Gournay that they form a mother-daughter alliance, and she eagerly asks Rivet for his “paternal” guidance—or permission—in her response to Gournay:

Your most Noble Gournay recently addressed me in writing, making it possible for me to firm up a closer bond (that of mother and daughter of course) between us. I beg you urgently, in accordance with prudence and your paternal oversight, to advise me as rapidly as possible what follow-up I should give to this request.

An intellectual alliance in the early modern period was founded on a literary partnership which was viewed in terms of a family tie. Male writers often entered into such relations either with each other—as in the case of Montaigne and Etienne de La Boétie (1530–1563)—or with members of their own family and clan. The poet Clément Marot (1496–1544) had a mère d’alliance, while Jacques de Romieu (1555–1632) collaborated in a literary partnership with his sister Marie de Romieu (ca. 1556–1598). Male intellectuals also chose literary sisters and daughters unrelated to them: Marot designated Anne d’Alençon, one of his dedicatees, as his sœur d’alliance, while Maurice Scève called Pernette du Guillet his sœur par alliance, and Madeleine de L’Aubespine declared to Ronsard, “I call myself your daughter.” Probably the most famous alliance was the one between Gournay and Montaigne, which began when Gournay was young and
which she likely sought to develop as a parallel to the relation between Montaigne and La Boétie. In the much older Montaigne she sought literary advice and correction, and a means to launch her writing and publishing career. She was also “adopted” into a famille d’alliance consisting of Montaigne as her “father,” Montaigne’s wife as her “mother,” Montaigne’s only surviving daughter Leonor as her “sister,” and Montaigne’s brothers who, she writes, “do me the honor of declaring themselves also members of my family.”

Gournay’s desire to form a mother-daughter alliance with Schurman, on the other hand, is highly unusual. A few literary mothers in early modern France mentored and collaborated with their own daughters: Antoinette de Loynes (1505–1568), the wife of the courtier and humanist pedagogue Jean de Morel, mentored, along with several humanist tutors, her three precocious daughters, Camille, Lucrèce, and Diane de Morel; Madeleine des Roches’s collaboration with her daughter Catherine des Roches, which was integral to their self-representation, is another well-known case. The Dames des Roches, mère et fille (mother and daughter), as they were commonly called, needed each other to legitimize their writing, publishing, and coterie. Another mother-daughter literary alliance was that of the Dames du Verger, both governesses in Paris at the end of the sixteenth century. Their educational treatise, Le Verger fertile des vertus (The fertile Orchard of virtues), is said to have been written by the mother and corrected and amplified by her daughter.

It is clear that Marie de Gournay and Anna Maria van Schurman did not need each other in the same way as the Dames des Roches or the Dames du Verger. Gournay was nearing the end of her scholarly career, and Schurman in 1640 was well on the path to fame. However, Schurman was interested in enlarging her circle of women correspondents and eager to show Gournay how much the latter had inspired her during the critical phase of her writing a reasoned defense of women’s education. Gournay’s emphasis on women’s capacity to reason and her use of evidence from authorities of antiquity and the Christian past appealed to her sense of argumentation and encyclopedic mastery of ancient texts. Why did Gournay, on the other hand, offer an intellectual alliance to her Dutch counterpart?
Gournay’s chief desire throughout her life, to gain respect and recognition in the Republic of Letters as a serious writer and intellectual, was reflected in her fight to engage literary men to take literary women seriously. She may have seen in Schurman an extraordinarily learned woman who, belonging to the category of the grands esprits (great minds), stood a better chance than she of drawing male respect and confounding the mockery attendant on a learned woman.42 As a “mothering figure,” she hoped for a younger “literary daughter” as an ally against the incomprehension of the age. As such, she may have cast Schurman as a nonconformist who dared, like her, to tread a path that few other women took, but who, unlike her, was able to outmaneuver the obstacles. She describes such a woman in her Promenade of Monsieur de Montaigne:

Everyone will say afterward that such a woman does ill, because she does not behave like others, neither in choosing her activities nor in regulating her actions. Let them talk; the worst I see in this is that we have to live in an age when a person who wishes to follow the right road must quit the well-worn one. Great intellects always stray from the beaten path, the more so because they have persuaded themselves that what is straying, according to custom, is submission to reason. . . . Superiority itself exists only in difference.43

Gournay also likely saw in Schurman an ally in defending the ancients, classical education, and humanistic literature against new poet grammarians such as François de Malherbe (1555–1628), whom she accused of changing the definition of literature and language to suit fashionable taste. Cathleen Bauschatz notes that Gournay faulted elite, salon women for the decline in classical education and the degeneration of the French language and states that they “helped to nail the lid on the coffin of humanism.”44

Gournay may have also wished to integrate Schurman into her own réseaux de sociabilité (networks of relationships), which included a number of distinguished women of the period, such as the Protestant intellectual Marie de Bruneau, Dame Des Loges, whose salon Gournay had frequented in the 1620s, Catherine de Sainte-Maure, Comtesse de Brassac, an habitué of Madame de Rambouillet’s salon, Madeleine de Seneterre, author of the novel Orasie (1646–1648), Jeanne de Schomberg (1600–1674),
Duchesse de Liancourt, Antoinette de Pons, Marquise de Guercheville, a lady-in-waiting to Marie de Médicis (1573–1642), Marguerite de Valois (1553–1615), and Anne of Austria. All these women figure in her references, dedications, prefaces, and letters, and function as protective *marraines* (godmothers) of her works. Now in her declining years, Gournay herself could have wished to be a *marraine* to Schurman’s writing career, thereby making herself useful in, and possibly shaping, the trajectory of a rising female star on the European literary stage.

**Anna Maria van Schurman, Marie de Gournay, and the Representation of the Female Self in Relation to the Public Sphere**

Gournay’s manuscript letter to Schurman in October 1639, discussed previously, indicates not only praise of Schurman but also criticism of her and a touchiness vis-à-vis the latter’s academic training in multiple ancient and oriental languages. This criticism springs from a possible competitiveness in Gournay stemming from their differing views on the self-representation of a woman intellectual in the literary public sphere.

As mentioned, Gournay may have thought that the time that the Dutch scholar spent on translating original sources was ill-founded and wasted. True knowledge for Gournay could be had in just one or two languages, French especially, rather than a host of them. In her *Abregé d’institution, pour le Prince Souverain* (*Abridged institution, for the Sovereign Prince*) for the future Louis XIII, she advised the young prince not to learn Latin and Greek (unless he had an inclination to do so) on grounds that he could read “all good Latin books” in French translation. Moreover, he was not to think of learning many languages as a worthy goal since “knowledge and wisdom” were far more important.

Gournay could have also contrasted her own lack of a formal education—she was an autodidact—to Schurman’s academic training (Schurman was the first woman to attend a Dutch university). In her autobiographical self-justification, *Apologie pour celle qui ecrit* (*Apology for the Woman Writing*), first published in 1626, she states that she had to
struggle to learn on her own, “without formal schooling” as she puts it, only one of the ancient languages, Latin. To ward off her critics, she calls herself “a learned woman without Greek, without Hebrew, without aptitude for providing scholarly commentary on authors, without manuscripts, without Logic, without Physics or Metaphysics, Mathematics or the rest.” Since she did not claim to be the *femme sçavante* her critics made her out to be, they should leave her alone: “So why will the babbling of the world not permit me to rest, without opposing me, in the seat of the learned or of the ignorant, of human beings or of beasts?”

Although Gournay was respected and praised by a number of well-known writers of her time, she was the target throughout her life of slanderous attacks and the butt of cruel jokes. Her defense of the ancients and Pléiade poets against linguistic theorists earned her ridicule. Her negative attitude toward language changes favoring salon and court usage was derided. She was also considered an embittered prude. Her learning, the difficulties she encountered as editor of Montaigne, and her unmarried state, made her extremely vulnerable to public condemnation. Furthermore, she promoted herself as an independent woman and professional writer, which was bound to create unbridgeable social—even financial—difficulties.

Schurman, on the other hand, sought to avoid any negative publicity associated with her status as a single learned woman. She was especially wary of her growing fame and entertained throughout her life a deeply held suspicion, fueled by her Calvinist convictions and piety, of the praise heaped upon her. Time and again, she insisted in her letters to famous men that she sought not the praise of men but of God. The following excerpts, for instance, epitomize her refusal to bask in her fame: “Now as for me,” she wrote to the Calvinist theologian Pierre du Moulin (1568–1658), “I would rather direct my gaze to God, the true dispenser and supporter of faithful friendships, than look to the favors of fame, for fear that truth itself might unsettle this foundation and interrupt your good graces.”

She asserted to Sir Simonds D’Ewes (1602–1650), an English antiquary at Parliament: “You ascribe unto me such literary glory that if I should willingly admit it, I should greatly offend against the laws of truth and modesty.” Her adept use of the humility trope—used by both men and
women, but especially by women to discount their learning—and her protectors’ use of it in their epistolary references to her, played a central role in making her more acceptable as a woman intellectual.

Schurman would have thus found problematic the confrontational and public aspects of Gournay’s exemplarity. As Linda Timmermans reminds us in *L’accès des femmes à la culture*, Schurman’s emphasis on the more private and personal goals of women’s learning was consonant with “the strategy of a social conformity which was more profitable than the anti-conformity of a Marie de Gournay who was indeed famous but was mocked and jeered at to such a degree that her memory today still suffers from it.”

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The epistolary exchange between Anna Maria van Schurman and Marie de Gournay presents a fascinating instance of two learned women intellectuals, their views of and influences on each other. Gournay admired, and perhaps even envied, Schurman’s erudition, likening her to the “new Star” that Tycho Brahe discovered in 1572. Yet she disapproved of her extensive studies in oriental and ancient languages on grounds that these detracted from demonstrating her philosophical learning, and that mastery of only a few languages—Spanish, Italian, French, Greek, and Latin—was sufficient. She may have invited her younger peer into a mother-daughter alliance to influence her and gain an ally in the fight against the incomprehension attendant on erudite women.

Schurman admired Gournay as a leader in the cause of women’s education, which she strongly advocated in her writings in the 1630s. However, Gournay’s confrontational honesty on gender relations, her radical advocacy of equality, and the mockery she often had to endure—all were at odds with Schurman’s retired personality and beliefs. Unlike Gournay, Schurman impressed her male learned contemporaries without offending them. The French Protestant Parlementaire, Claude Sarrau (ca. 1600–1651), characteristically pointed out in a letter to Rivet: “She [Schurman] is certainly one of the marvels of our age. Her modesty enhances her erudition to which one is right to attach great importance.” Schurman’s perceived modesty constituted her best strategy for acceptance
into the Republic of Letters. This resulted in her being admired throughout her career in the 1630s and 1640s for her virtue, goodness, and merit, qualities little connected to extensive literary output but essential to a woman writer’s self-representation and acceptance in the public sphere.

**APPENDIX**

Marie de Gournay to Anna Maria van Schurman, October 20, 1639, ms. 133 B 8, no. 76. Koninklijke Bibliotheek, The Hague.

*Mademoiselle,*

I would be unfair to the rightful purpose of my letter, if I mixed in other matters with my very humble thanks, which your generous favors have so justly deserved; or else what field wouldn’t be open for me to praise you! I indeed admit freely that the ability to represent them [your favors] as they should be is limited by the narrow bounds of my ability as well as the rewards of so few services that I have rendered to the Muses. Receive, therefore, my thanks, which I consider worthy to be received by you in these lines only because of the religious wish that I am making that my heart will celebrate such thanks forever.

Will I dare tell you Philosophically, in passing, a little word of advice: languages employ too much, and for too long a time, a mind as capable of things, and of the best, as yours; nor is it of any help for you to say, as you do, that you want to read the Originals in every case, because the translations are not worthy of them; indeed, all that letters can contain that is truly worthy of a soul like yours, I find written in Latin, and at the furthest also in Greek, to which you can add with little trouble Italian, Spanish, and above all French, which the essays, among others, have rendered necessary to the universe. If I still live a couple more years I will send you the new impression of my *Advis* where your name will be included, remaining however with all my heart,

*MADEMOISELLE,*

Your very humble and very faithful servant,

GOURNAY. The 20th of October, 1639.
Notes

1. Other well-known female correspondents include Queen Anne of Austria (1601–1666), Bathshua Reginald Makin (1600–ca. 1675), Lady Dorothy Moore (ca. 1610–1664), Birgitta Thott (1610–1662) of Denmark, and Johanna Eleonora Petersen (née von Merlau) (1644–1724). Schurman’s writings were known to the Anglo-Saxon scholar Elizabeth Elstob (1616–1680) and the latter’s close friend Mary Astell (1666–1731), Queen Christina of Sweden (1626–1689), who paid Schurman a visit in 1652, and the German countess Benigna von Solms-Lauchach. My thanks to the journal’s anonymous readers and to Charles Huttar for their helpful editorial comments.


4. Guillaume (dates unknown) expresses her appreciation for Schurman with the words “l’incomparable Anne Marie de Scurman me charme” (“the incomparable Anna Maria van Schurman charms me”), Les Dames illustres où par bonnes et fortes raisons, il se prouve, que le sexe féminin surpassé en toute sorte de genre le sexe masculin (Paris: Thomas Jolly, 1665), 282; Buffet (d. 1680) added two foreign women, Christina of Sweden and Schurman, to her list of seventeen French contemporary learned women, Nouvelles obser-
vations sur la langue française, où il est traité des termes anciens et inusitez, et du bel usage des mots nouveaux: Avec les éloges des illustres savantes, tant anciennes que modernes (Paris: Jean Cusson, 1668), 242.


8. Contemporary women writers’ search for applicable contemporary models is related to a decline in the use of ancient exemplars in humanist texts. Recent critics have described this decline as a late Renaissance “crisis of exemplarity.” Late humanist writers, they argue, questioned the applicability and universality of ancient exemplars, given the diversity and unpredictability of human actions. See François Rigolot, “The Renaissance Crisis of Exemplarity,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 59, no. 4 (1998): 557–63, and the articles in this issue by several leading critics in the debate on humanist exemplarity. Pollie
Bromilow argues insightfully that female writers are important and unacknowledged players in the decrease in authority of ancient exemplars during the Renaissance period. Female authors such as Marguerite de Navarre, she indicates, “were far more cautious in embracing the ideology that came as part and parcel of the exemplary deed. The vested interests represented by the careful excavation of the glorious and prestigious past are repeatedly shown not to be relevant to women’s experience as either writer or reader.” See “The Case of Lucretia: Female Exemplarity in Boaistea and Belleforest’s *Histoires tragiques* and Marguerite de Navarre’s *Heptaméron*,” in *Female Saints and Sinners: Saintes et mondaines (France 1450–1650)*, ed. Jennifer Britnell and Ann Moss (Durham, England: University of Durham, 2002), 165.


13. According to Alan Boase, “Marie de Gournay was that extreme rarity in her time, a professional writer, not a princess or a great lady dabbling in literature.” See *The Fortunes of Montaigne* (London: Methuen, 1935), 55.


Palladis arma geris, bellis animosa virago; / Utque
geras lauros, Palladis arma geris. / Sic decet innocc
causam te dicere sexus, / Et propria
in sones vertere tela viros. / I prae
Gornacense decus, tua signa sequemur: / Quippe tibi
potior, robore, cause praetit. For a slightly different translation, see Pieta van Beek, “Alpha
Virginum: Anna Maria van Schurman (1607–1678),” in Women Writing Latin from
Roman Antiquity to Early Modern Europe, ed. Laurie J. Churchill, Phyllis R. Brown, and

16. Gournay is likened to the “Femme forte” (strong woman), an androgynous
figure that would become popular in France in the 1640s in such works as Madeleine de
Scudéry’s Les Femmes illustres (1644), Jacques du Bosc’s La Femme heroique (1645), and
Pierre Le Moyne’s Gallerie des femmes fortes (1647).

17. Schurman’s ode, INCLYTAE ET ANTIQUAE URBI TRAJECTINAE Nova
Academia superrime donatae gratulatur ANNA MARIA SCHURMAN (Anna Maria
Schurman congratulates the famous and ancient city of Utrecht on its recently founded univer-
sity), and her French composition, Remarque d’Anne Marie de Schurman were published
in a commemorative volume containing speeches given by Utrecht professors. Her Dutch
poem was published on the back of Utrecht professor and theologian Gisbertus Voetius’s
Sermoen van de Nuttigheydt der Academien ende Scholen (Sermon on the Usefulness of
Academies and Schools), given on the occasion of the founding of the university of Utrecht.
The Latin ode was later included in the Opuscula (1648), 262–3, while the French poem
was added to the 1652 edition of the Opuscula, 302. On these poems, see Pieta van Beek,
“O Utregh, lieve stad . . . : Poems in Dutch by Anna Maria van Schurman,” in Choosing
the Better Part: Anna Maria van Schurman (1607–1678), ed. Mirjam de Baar, Machteld
Löwensteyn, Marit Monteiro, and Agnes Sneller (Dordrecht, Boston, and London: Kluwer, 1996), and Pieta van Beek, “Alpha Virginum.”

18. Schurman, Whether a Christian Woman, 43; Dissertatio, 48: “colum & acum
tractare, mulieribus satis amplum Lyceum esse.”

19. Gournay, Apology for the Woman Writing and Other Works, ed. Richard
Hillman and Colette Quesnel, The Other Voice Series (Chicago: University of Chicago
Press, 2002), 75; Égalité des hommes et des femmes, in Oeuvres complètes, 1: 965: “la que-
nouille, ouy mesmes à la quenouille seule.”

20. Schurman to Rivet, November 6, 1637, Whether a Christian Woman, 44;
Dissertatio, 48: “contrarium evincent ... Uti non minus lepidè quàm erudite ostendit
nobilissimum Gornacensium decus in libello quem inscripsit, L’egalité des hommes & des
femmes.”


22. Schurman to Rivet, March 24, 1638, Whether a Christian Woman, 55;
Dissertatio, 71: “Nobilissimæ Gornacensis dissertatiunculam: De l’egalité des hommes &
des femmes, uti ab elegantia ac lepore improbare minimè possum: ita eam per omnia
comprobare nec ausim quidem, nec velim.”

nem Lucretiae Marinellæ, cui titulum fecit, La nobilta e l’excelenza delle donne con diffetti e mancamenti de gli huomini.”


25. A Collection of Seventy Four Letters and Four Latin Poems etc. in the handwriting of the very talented and very celebrated Anna Maria de Schurman, the letters altogether addressed to Andrew Rivet D.D., Tutor of the Young Prince of Orange and Author of “Critici Sacri” etc. etc., 1632–1669, ms. 133 B8, no. 76, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, The Hague: “Oseray je en passant vous dire philosophiquement un mot de mon petit advis: les langues employent trop, et longtemps un esprit capable des choses, et des meilleures que le vostre, ni ne vous sert de dire, comme vous faictes, que vous voulez lire les Originaux par tout, pour ce que les versions ne les valent pas.” This letter has been published in Gilles Banderier, “Une lettre inédite de Marie de Gournay (1639),” Montaigne Studies 16 (2004): 151–5; and Anne Marie de Schurman, Anne Marie de Schurman. Femme savante (1607–1678). Correspondence, ed. Constant Venesoen (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2004), 156–8. See my translation of this letter in the appendix to this essay.

26. Gournay to Schurman, October 20, 1639: “ont rendu necessaire à l’univers.”

27. Gournay states in an essay addressed to the future Louis XIII that he need not waste his time on Greek and Hebrew, “deux langues qui seroient reservées à ceux que leur profession oblige à les sçavoir” (“two languages that are reserved for those whose profession obliges them to learn”). See “Abregé d’institution, pour le Prince Souverain,” in Marie Le Jars de Gournay, Les advis, ou, les Presens de la Demoiselle de Gournay 1641, ed. Jean-Philippe Beaulieu and Hannah Fournier, presentation by Marie-Thérèse Noiset, 2 vols. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994), 1: 202. My thanks to Marie-Thérèse Noiset for bringing this text to my attention and for commenting on an earlier draft of this essay.

28. Gournay to Schurman, October 20, 1639: “où vostre nom se lira.”

29. Schurman, Whether a Christian Woman, 70; Opuscula, 318: “des advantages, que vos heroiques vertus ont procuré à nostre sexe.”

30. Schurman, Whether a Christian Woman, 70; Opuscula, 318: “esperance que mon nom se verra un jour consacré à l’immortalité par la faveur de vostre Muse”; Opuscula, 318: “je m’imagine par une douce reverie, que les marques de vostre affection qui s’y liront sans doute, ne me seront pas moins glorieuses que l’honneur d’une louange que j’aurois meritee.” In the final edition of her Advis (1641), Gournay includes in her catalogue of women worthies only one contemporary woman whom she judged the grand exception, Schurman. The astronomer Tycho Brahe, she states, had he lived later, would surely have named the new planet that he discovered after “Mademoiselle de Schurman: l’emulatrice de ces illustres Dames en l’eloquence, et de leurs Poetes Lyriques encore, memeement sur leur propre Langue Latine, et qui possede avec celle-la, toutes les autres antiques et nouvelles et tous les Arts liberaux et nobles.” See Gournay, Oeuvres complètes, 1: 969. (“Mademoiselle van Schurman: the rival of those illustrious ladies in eloquence, and of their lyric poets, too, even in their own Latin language, and who, besides that language, possesses all the others, ancient and modern, and all the liberal and noble arts.”
See *Apology for the Woman Writing*, 78). This is the first and only time that Gournay cites Schurman. See also Mario Schiff, *La fille d’alliance de Montaigne, Marie de Gournay* (Paris: Champion, 1910), 79.

31. The purpose of the rhetorical *captatio benevolentiae* is to make the hearer or reader favorably disposed and attentive.

32. Schurman, *Whether a Christian Woman*, 70; *Opuscula*, 319: “Quand à ce que vous avez opinion, que je m’amuse trop à l’estude des langues, je vous puis assurer que je n’y contribue que les heures de mon loisir, & quelquefois après d’assez longs intervalles; si seulement vous me permettez d’excepter la langue Sainte.”


34. Schurman to Rivet, Latin letter, October 4, 1640, ms. 133 B 8, no. 23, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, The Hague: “Scripto me nuper compellavit Nobilissima vestra Gornacensis artioris foederis, matris scilicet ac filiæ, inter nos firmandi potestatem mihi primu designes etiam atque etiam rogo.” See Anna M. H. Douma, “Anna Maria van Schurman en de Studie der Vrouw,” (PhD diss., University of Amsterdam, 1924), 45, for a reference to this letter.


41. Susan Broomhall and Colette H. Winn, eds., *Le Verger fertile des vertus*. Composé par defuncte Madame du Verger augmenté et amplifié par Philippe du Verger sa fille, femme d’un Procureur de la Cour (Paris: Champion, 2004). Neither the mother nor the daughter can be verified in archival and historical documents. The editors surmise that the treatise may in fact have been entirely written by the daughter and that the notion of a maternal authorship is a strategy of legitimation.

42. In Grief des Dames, in *Oeuvres complètes*, 1: 1075, Gournay states: “il n’y a si chetif qui ne les rembarre avec approbation de la pluspart des assistans, quand avec un souris seulement, ou quelque petit branslement de teste, son eloquence muette aura dit: ‘C’est une femme qui parle’” (*The Ladies Complaint*, in *Apology for the Woman Writing*, 101: “there is no man, however mediocre, who does not put them [women] in their place with the approval of most of the company, when, with merely a smile or some slight shaking of his head, his mute eloquence pronounces, ‘It’s a woman speaking’”).

43. Gournay, *The Promenade of Monsieur de Montaigne* (1594), in *Apology for the Woman Writing*, 55; *Oeuvres complètes* (1641), 2: 1356: “Or après tout le monde dira qu’une telle femme faict mal, puis qu’elle ne faict pas comme les autres, ny a choisir son exercice, ny a disposer ses actions; laissez-le parler, le pis que je voye en cecy, c’est que nous ayons a vivre en un siecle, où il fault quicter le chemin fraisé qui veult suivre le droict chemin. Les grands esprits ont tousjours des extravagances hors l’usage, d’autant qu’ils se sont persuadez que ce qui est extravagance a la coutume est reduction a la raison... Si est-ce que l’adventage mesme ne peut avoir lieu qu’en difference.”


49. On these difficulties, see Devincenzo, *Marie de Gournay*, 157–62.

50. Schurman to Pierre du Moulin, French letter, March 20, 1635, in *Opuscula*, 278: “Or quand à moi, j’esleveray plustost mes yeux à Dieu qui est le vray dispensateur et soustien des amitiez fideles, que de m’arrester aux faveurs de la renommée: de peur que la verité mesme puisse esbranler ce fondement, et m’interrompre vos bonnes graces.”

51. Schurman to Sir Simonds D’Ewes, Latin letter, October 31, 1645, in *Opuscula*,
218: “Eam quippè literarum gloriam mihi attribuis, quam si ultro admitterem, in veritatis ac modestiae leges graviter peccarem.”

52. Linda Timmermans, L’accès des femmes à la culture, 307: “la stratégie de conformisme social était plus payante que l’anticonformisme d’une Marie de Gournay, célèbre, certes, mais moquée, raillée, à tel point que sa mémoire en souffre encore aujourd’hui.”

53. Gournay, Apology for the Woman Writing, 78.


55. “Advis” in the original, a play on the title of Gournay’s work Les Advis, ou, les Presens de la Demoiselle de Gournay (1634, 1641).

56. A reference to Montaigne’s essays.

57. Gournay included a tribute to Schurman in her final edition of the Advis (1641); see Oeuvres complètes, 1: 969; Apology for the Woman Writing and Other Works, 78.