An Early French Renaissance Salon: The Morel Household

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Dès la fin des années 1540, la famille de Jean de Morel accueillait dans sa maison de la rue Pavée à Paris les poètes et les humanistes les plus proéminents de la capitale : Nicolas Bourbon, Jean Salmon Macrin, Jean Dorat parmi les néo-latins ; Joachim Du Bellay, Ronsard, Jean-Antoine de Baïf, pour ne citer que quelques-uns des poètes de langue vulgaire. Or, la femme de Morel, Antoinette de Loynes, et ses trois filles, Camille, Lucrèce et Diane, avaient toutes les quatre reçu une éducation humaniste, leur permettant non seulement de participer aux activités littéraires et humanistes de ce que l’on a appelé le premier salon en France, mais encore d’attirer l’admiration du monde cultivé de l’époque. En examinant la correspondance des membres de la famille ainsi que certains ouvrages imprimés, cet article se propose d’illustrer les relations que les membres de la famille ont entretenues avec les visiteurs du salon ainsi que les changements d’attitude qui ont eu lieu au cours du XVIe siècle à l’égard de l’éducation des jeunes filles.

Despite the considerable interest in the Morel family shown in the first half of the twentieth century, relatively little has been written about its members in more recent years, though there are signs that this is now changing.1 The members of the family published relatively little, yet they appear to have been keen correspondents, and many letters to and from them have been preserved, both in Paris and in Munich.2 As a result, it is possible to gain a good sense of the development of this early literary salon, and to see the role which the women played in it: in the first place Antoinette de Loynes, the learned but self-effacing wife of Jean de Morel, and in the second the rather less self-effacing Camille de Morel and her sisters, Lucrèce and Diane. In what follows, I do not propose to rewrite the history of the family, which Samuel F. Will accomplished admirably in 1936, but rather to concentrate on the attitudes both of the women members of the household themselves and of
the literary and scholarly male establishment towards female erudition in the middle decades of the sixteenth century.

Jean de Morel, seigneur de Grigny, was born ca. 1511. He was a pupil of Erasmus, and legend had it that he was present at his death bed in Bâle in 1536. After various travels, particularly in Italy, he took up residence in Paris, where he is known to be living by 1541. A letter from Nicolas Bourbon in Turin to Jean de Morel and his pupil Girolamo della Rovere, dated 23 September 1541 (9° Cal. octob. 1541), is addressed to them “Au college St iehan de Lateran A Paris.” Some time after this, Morel married Antoinette de Loynes, daughter of François de Loynes, a close friend of both Erasmus and Bude, and widow of Lubin Dallier, who had died between 1540 and 1544. François de Loynes had given his three daughters a humanist education, which would no doubt have provided a close bond between Antoinette and her second husband, along with their shared family connections with Erasmus. When they in turn had three daughters (Camille, born in 1547, Lucrèce, in 1548 or 1549, and Diane, in 1550) as well as a son, Isaac, they did not hesitate to offer them the best education possible. Thus, although the Morel salon was not exclusively a female one, it was marked from the beginning by the presence of learned women.

In terms of the writers and humanists who frequented the Morels and gave the salon its specific character, it is useful to divide the period over which it was active into three parts. The first covers its beginnings in the 1540s, when it appears to be principally neo-Latin poets such as Nicolas Bourbon, Jean Salmon Macrin, and Jean Dorat who are associated with the household. The 1550s certainly see its heyday, with Jean Dorat still, Joachim Du Bellay, Ronsard, George Buchanan, Michel de L’Hospital, and many others attending, while the 1560s and 1570s see a new, if less illustrious group of writers joining the group. What is clear about the circle is that it started off and continued to be marked with a strongly humanist bias. Erudition was prized for its own sake, which meant that Latin and Greek were common currency among those frequenting the Morel household, and Hebrew not uncommon. As Camille de Morel would later write: “Nam te scire reor quod doctis omni-bus huius / Carole sit nunquam ianua clausa domus.” The vast majority of letters which have survived between members of this group are in Latin, often peppered with Greek, and it would not have been surprising, given the international composition of the membership, if the normal language of discussion were Latin too. Some of the correspondence is concerned with the technicalities of Latin versification, particularly false quantities, as well as more purely literary questions.
However, there was also a practical side to the salon, and crucial to the success of those who were involved with it was the relationship between Jean de Morel and Michel de L'Hospital, whose influence was able to advance the career of more than one of the habitués.9

The principal female influence for the first two out of these three periods would have been Antoinette de Loynes. We can gain an excellent idea of her character as well as of her self-effacing erudition in the letter which she wrote, some time late in the 1540s, to Nicolas Bourbon.10 In response to Bourbon’s request to write more frequently to him, she replies:


(…] I know indeed that my writings are no less foolish than those of children. For, as far as literature is concerned, I am clearly a speechless infant, since I began to give attention to it with more levity than I ought to have, and then I scarcely ever had the free time to study seriously, not even now. My endless tasks in other areas are responsible for this, which detain me on a daily basis right from dawn to dusk. For after worshipping God Almighty and giving undying thanks to Him for the supreme favour He has bestowed on us in Christ the saviour, His son, my husband is my principal concern. I speak of the “concern” which you know it to be right for a Christian wife to have for her upright, learned, and wise husband. I indeed am convinced and confirm that he is so, to whom Christ has joined me, whose virtue and honesty I do not hesitate to place before all the possessions of the blessed in my every utterance. Then I have to take care of giving a proper education and instruction to the children, who daily are getting bigger and more numerous; and then I also have to look after the whole of the running of the house. For I wish to spare my husband these annoyances, so that he can entirely devote himself (which I earnestly desire) to literature. So, this is what calls me away from the study of literature, to which I have scarcely given, as they say, more than a passing nod.)

We see in this letter the typical modesty expected and required of women in the early Renaissance, however well educated they may have been. Yet, at the same time, it is clear that Antoinette de Loynes is able to express herself
clearly and fluently in Latin, and that, despite her domestic duties, she has considerable respect for literature. Even when her children had grown up, however, we still see her hiding behind this modesty. In an incomplete letter found in her writing desk by her husband after her death in 1569, she wrote to a friend called Almanus:¹²

Nuper a me petebas Clarissime Almane ut tibi ostenderem aliquid meorum scriptorum. Ego nugas potius quam scripta appellare consueui. Scio enim nihil a me proficisci posse quod momenti alicuius esse quaet: praeertim apud homines eruditos in quibus iure optimo tu nostra hac aetate principatum facile obtines. [...] Hoc tantum agnoscere ingenue possum me desiderio quodam humaniorum literarum eoque non obscuro vehementer teneri.

(Most illustrious Almanus, you were recently asking me to show you some of my writings. I usually prefer to call them trifles rather than writings. For I know that nothing can come from me which can be of any importance, especially in the company of the learned, among whom with perfect justice you are easily pre-eminent in this age of ours. [...] I can honestly admit this one thing, that I am ardently possessed by a desire for the writing of scholars, which is far from hidden.)

Thus, de Loynes appears to have maintained this modest yet erudite attitude throughout her life.

This did not prevent her from contributing poems to commemorate the deaths of various contemporaries, including Marguerite de Navarre (in 1549 and 1550), Joachim Du Bellay, and Salmon Macrin’s wife, Gelonis. The relatively private nature of the work in which this last contribution appears, Macrin’s Naeniarum libri tres, de Gelonide Borsala uxore charissima (Paris: Vasconsan, 1550), provides a good indication of the people she is likely to have met at her home in the rue Pavée up until this year. They include Jean Dorat, one of whose contributions starts the collection of “Diuersorum authorum poema Latina, Graeca, Gallica de Gelonide”; Pierre Boulenger, a native of Troyes, who addressed an undated Greek ode to Jean de Morel in the Camerarius collection in Munich;¹³ Nicolas Denisot, the friend of the early members of the Brigade; Joachim Du Bellay; and Jean de Morel himself. Over 30 years later, Pierre Boulenger and Jean Dorat would contribute poems to the Tumulus which Camille de Morel organized to commemorate her father’s death.¹⁴ Denisot and Du Bellay were both dead.

To these, we can add Charles de Sainte-Marthe (1512–1555), a doctor of law and theology, who was suspected of Lutheranism. He became Marguerite de Navarre’s maître des requêtes and tutor to Jeanne d’Albret. He published a collection of poems in three books, La Poësie française (Lyon: Le Prince, 1540), as well as some psalm paraphrases and an Oraison funèbre
We can judge both his sense of despair at Marguerite de Navarre’s death, and the importance for him of the Morel salon, in a letter he wrote to Jean de Morel on 20 December 1550:

Mortua Regina, hera mea morte quoque mihi sublata est, ac simul spes omnes meae conciderunt. Non habeo amplius ad quem confugiam, non habeo quem implorem nisi solum Deum. Pater me meus persequitur, Fratres infesti mihi sunt omnes, Vxoris parentes adeo sunt molesti, vt tales indignitates sustinere amplius non possim. […] Peto itaque a te, amicorum optime, vt me optimo ac constantissimo Literarum Moecenati, Hospitali, commendes: cuius favore, potero in familiam D. D. Margaritae euocari. […] Saluta D. uxorem tuam, delectissimam fœminam. Vos Jesus sospitet, & meorum casuum misereatur.

(With the death of the Queen, my mistress has also been taken from me by death, and at the same time all my hopes have tumbled to the ground. I no longer have anyone to whom I can flee for refuge, no one to beseech save only God. My father pursues me, my brothers are all hostile to me, my parents-in-law are so troublesome that I can no longer bear such indignities. […] So I seek from you, dearest of friends, a recommendation to that best and most steadfast of literary patrons Michel de L’Hospital, by whose favour I shall be in a position to be called to the household of Madame Marguerite [i.e. Marguerite de Berry, whose chancellor L’Hospital was at this time]. […] Please greet your wife, that most exquisite of women. May Jesus preserve you, and take pity on my woes.)

We can see in this letter on the one hand the Morel family’s loyalty to their friends, and on the other the pivotal position that Jean de Morel was felt to play in the gaining of preference. This theme comes through many of the letters to be found in the Camerarius collection. When Charles’s nephew, Scévole de Sainte-Marthe, went to Paris in 1560, he too was quickly “adopted” by the Morel family, as well as by Michel de L’Hospital.

Putting aside this more utilitarian aspect of the salon, its early activities must have revolved around the writing and commenting on Latin poetry, if the letters exchanged between the members of the group are anything to go by. The neo-Latin poets involved were already among the best and the most innovative in France (especially Salmon Macrin), and in many ways, the early members of the Pléiade, under the tutelage of Jean Dorat, were transferring into the vernacular the kind of poetic practice which the neo-Latinists had already developed in Latin: the cultivation of “new” forms of poetry such as the ode; the recourse to new styles of writing, such as the “style mignard,” developed from the neo-Catullan poetry of Salmon Macrin and Johannes Secundus; and above all the notion of poetry as erudite, inspired, and of high status. Clearly, Jean de Morel and his family recognized these qualities in Ronsard, Baïf, and Du Bellay, and offered them their protection.
The 1550s not only saw the presence of these early members of the Pléiade in the Morel circle, they also witnessed the burgeoning of the talent of the second important female presence in the salon, Camille de Morel. Born in 1547, she must have been educated in her early years by her mother, before being entrusted to the brilliant young humanist and poet, Charles Utenhove. Born in Ghent in 1536, he would only have been around 21 when he joined the Morel household, probably in 1557. His father and grandfather had both known Erasmus. Charles himself studied under Johannes Otho before moving to Paris in autumn 1536, where he immediately became acquainted with the leading humanists of the day, Dorat, Turnèbe, Buchanan, and Lambin, as well as with Ronsard and Du Bellay. He was clearly a popular tutor with the Morel children, and set about teaching them Greek and Hebrew, as well as Latin.

We can judge something of the talents of the eleven-year-old Camille in a collection of poems in the Munich manuscript marking the death of Gilbert Dagoult on 6 October 1558. Her contribution consists of four Latin epigrams in elegiac couplets, a Greek epigram in elegiac couplets, two Greek epigrams in iambic dimeters, and a curious Latin poem, entirely in adonics, based on a poem by Du Bellay in the same collection. One wonders whether this last poem was an exercise set by Utenhove for his young pupil. The first of the Latin epigrams reads as follows:

Corpore non magno quamuis Dagoltius esset,
Ingenio paruo non tamen ille fuit.
Ille videns mundum pereuntem, linquere mundum
Iam volo peruersum dixit, et ingemuit.

(Though Dagoult had a small body, he did not have a small mind. Seeing the world falling apart, he said: “I now wish to leave this perverse world,” and groaned.)

In the manuscript, the last line has been corrected, so that “Iam volo peruersum” is replaced by “Iam libet ingratum”: “Now it is pleasing [to leave this] ungrateful [world],” a change made because the final *o* of *volo* is long, thus causing a problem with the scansion. Nonetheless, the poem is generally competent, especially for an eleven-year-old, and similar to epitaphs of other, more mature writers of the period.

Camille’s talents were certainly appreciated by those frequenting the Morel salon. A couple of years later, in 1560, Jean Dorat addressed an ode to her, inviting her to become godmother to his son, which begins:
O nec paterni degener ingenii,
Et matre docta filia doctior,
Si tu Morelli uera proles,
Veraque filia Deloinae,
Diuina sed uis mentis et indolis,
Diuinus artes impetus ad bonas
Vnam iubet te suspicari
Mnemosynes Iouis et puellam.

(O daughter who are true to your father’s genius, more learned than your learned mother, if you are the true offspring of Morel and the true daughter of de Loynes; but a godlike strength of mind and nature, a godlike impulse towards the liberal arts make me suspect that you are unique, the daughter of Mnemosyne and Jupiter.)

Later in the same ode, Dorat speaks of her male genius (“ingeniumque mas est,” l. 48), a sign that she has gone beyond what might have been expected of her sex in intellectual terms. Around the same time, George Buchanan, another habitué of the Morel salon, wrote the following alcaic ode to Camille, which celebrates her charm as well as her learning, while at the same time paying a compliment to Buchanan’s friend, Utenhove:17

Camilla, multo me mihi carior,
Aut si quid ipso est me mihi carius,
Camilla, doctorum parentum
Et patriae decus et voluptas,
Ni Gratiae te plus oculis ament,
Ni te Camoenae plus oculis ament,
Nec Gratias gratas, nec ipsas
Esse rare lepidas Camoenas;
Quae virgo nondum nubilis, artibus
Doctis Minervam, pectine Apollinem,
Cantu Camoenas, et lepore
Vel superes Charites vel aeques.
Hos ferre fructus, Utenhovi, decidet
Laurum vireto quae teneram comam
Nutrivit et ramos refudit,
Castalia saturato rore.

(Camille, much dearer to me than I am myself, or than anything which is dearer to me than myself, Camille, the glory and delight of your learned parents and your country, if the Graces do not love you more than their eyes, if the Muses do not love you more than their eyes, I would not think the Graces are graceful, or the very Muses charming. Although you are still a maiden not yet of marriageable age, you would outstrip or equal Minerva in the learned arts, Apollo on the lyre, the Muses in singing, and the Graces in charm. It is fitting that these fruits, Utenhove, should be borne by the laurel tree...
which fed its tender leaves in a grassy place, and, soaked in Castalian dew, drenched its branches in turn.

Given this, and other complimentary attention from writers such as Du Bellay, it is not surprising that Camille should have developed a certain confidence in her talents, musical as well as literary. It is also clear that she was widely read. A curious poem in the Munich collection, dating from 1568 (Cod. Lat. 10383, ff. 245r–246v), and beginning “Hoc ego si feci, vel si fecisse quid unquam / Tale mihi placuit, vel placuisse velim,” contains a whole string of punishments she would wish inflicted upon herself, many of which are inspired by Ovid’s *Ibis*. Typical allusions include: “Therodamantaeos possim sentire Leones, / Inijciar medio medio lacerata, freto” (“May I feel the lions of Therodamas and be cast, thus torn apart, in the midst of the sea”), which refers to a Libyan king who threw foreigners to lions (*Ibis* 383); and “Haud secus ac Glauci praesepia reddat equorum / Omni parte meus sanguinolenta cruor” (“May my blood make the horses’ stables gory on all sides, just like that of Glaucus”), an allusion to the son of Sisyphus, devoured by his own horses (*Ibis* 555). The abstruse nature of these Ovidian references and their overt nature show that her attitude to learning is a far cry from what was considered appropriate for women at the beginning of the century, when Vives wrote: “[…] Ovid teaches that they [i.e. Greek and Roman love poets] must be repudiated by the chaste […] and […] he prohibits the reading of his own poetry.”

Unlike her mother, then, who we have seen always fought shy of parading her compositions, Camille was used to being in the limelight, aided and abetted by her tutor, Utenhove, who continued to promote her talents after he left the service of the Morel household in 1561. He ensured that she was known at the court of Elizabeth I after he went to England in 1562, and he continued to keep in contact with her long after that. Following his return to the Low Countries, he appears to have initiated an epistolary exchange between Camille and the daughter of his former teacher, Jeanne Othon.

Despite their shared education, Lucrèce and Diane did not achieve the same celebrity as their older sister, though it is clear that they too attained considerable fluency in Latin. A letter by Diane de Morel to Marguerite de France, written when she was not yet nine, bears witness to her rhetorical skills at this tender age:

Excellens tuum quidem ingenium, diuinos tuae mentis spiritus, sanctissima tua studia, atque opera, comitatem et humanitatem incredibilem, dicta factaque tua omnia praestissima, meis a parentibus tantopere quotidie praedicari, cum audiam: Quo possum, tui ad admirationem, vt & ipsa quoque non commouear, atque inflammar?
(When I hear my parents on a daily basis proclaiming to such a degree your outstanding
genius, the godlike qualities of your mind, your most saintly studies and good works,
your incredible obligingness and kindness, and all your most splendid words and deeds,
how can I myself not also be moved and excited to admiration of you?)

Moreover, Pierre Boulenger, whom we have already encountered as one of
the first members of the Morel salon, wrote a poem in her honour, whose
imagery is largely based on the connotations of her name, Diana the moon
goddess, concluding:

Te tua fata trahunt alio, tibi carmina curae,
Quaeque vnas deceant Musas; tibi semper honestus
Est decor, & grati comes indiuula decoris
Forma nitet, qualis radians micat aethere Luna.

(Your fate takes you in a different direction [from that of hunting], your concern is with
poetry, and activities such as are proper for the Muses alone. You possess an ever noble
grace, and your beauty shines forth as an inseparable companion of pleasing grace, as the
beaming Moon shines in the heavens.)

The only known letter by Lucrèce (in French rather than Latin) was
published by Will (art. cit., p. 110), and dates from 1572. Nevertheless, she is
thought to have been even better educated than her younger sister.

The atmosphere of the Morel household and those who frequented it
clearly had an effect on the attitudes of the three sisters to female erudition.
Although in the early years they were seen as exceptional, as much because
of their sex as because of their age, this novelty must eventually have worn
off, especially in the case of Camille. It is in the Tumulus, which she saw
through the press in 1583 in memory of her father, that her confidence with
regard to the male literary establishment is most in evidence. In addition to
poems by herself and others to her dead father, mother, and sister (Lucrèce),
Camille also included her own poems to members of the salon who had not
yet provided a contribution. Of these, her elegiac poem to Ronsard is typical.
It begins:
Clare nepos clari vera probitate Morelli,
Ronsarde, ô patriae lausque decusque tuae,
Sic Patrui manes iam negligis, vt sit in illos
Nulla tua docta linea ducta manu?
Tam cito te capiunt tam chari obliuia amici?
Qui fuit extremum fidus ad usque diem:
Tu ne etiam ingrati lustras vestigia vulgi,
Quem tam clara, super sidera, fama tulit?
(ed. cit., p. 45)

(Famed nephew of Morel, famed for his true honesty, Ronsard, glory and honour of your motherland, do you now so neglect your uncle’s shades that there is no line of poetry written in their honour by your learned hand? Are you so swiftly overcome by forgetfulness of such a dear friend, who remained loyal until his final day? Do you too follow the footsteps of the ungrateful mob, you who are borne beyond the stars by your renowned fame?)

Camille feels not the slightest hesitation in adopting a critical tone towards the greatest and most successful poet to have attended the Morel salon, a sign that she felt exempt from the traditional silence imposed upon women in the early modern period. Moreover, she had also avoided marriage, so that, as a learned, unmarried daughter of obvious virtue, she was able to live a relatively independent life. Although little is known about the salon after the death of her father, it is probable that it continued to exist. Will mentions the admiration which the German poet and humanist Paul Melissus expressed for Camille as late as the 1580s. But by this time, the star of the Pléiade and those associated with them was already beginning to wane, and Camille herself gently slips into obscurity.

Nevertheless, the development of the Morel salon demonstrates the changes which were taking place in French society with regard to female education. Antoinette de Loynes conforms completely to the ideal of the educated but silent and obedient woman propounded by Vives as the model to follow. Her primary concerns are with her husband and her family, and it is only in her rare moments of leisure that she takes up her pen. Camille, on the other hand, is far from silent. Accustomed to being admired for her scholarly achievements, she shows a confidence which appears not to have shocked the men who frequented the Morel salon, either in terms of what she read or what she wrote. She lived at least until 1611, and her career no doubt foreshadows the greater role which women such as the marquise de Rambouillet and Madeleine de Scudéry would play in seventeenth-century French society.

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Notes


2. See in particular BnF ms lat. 8589, and in the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich Cod. Lat. 10383.


4. See Cod. Lat. 10383, f. 168.

5. On François de Loynes, see the article in *Contemporaries of Erasmus*, vol. 1, pp. 385–6.

6. Émile Dupré-Lasale gives the details of the baptismal records of the three daughters in his study *Michel de l’Hospital avant son élévation au poste de Chancelier de France, 1505–1558*, 2 vols (Paris: Thorin et fils, 1875–1899). The dates of the three christenings are 18 September 1547 (Camille), 16 January 1549, n.s. (Lucrèce), and 9 June 1550 (Anne, later referred to as Diane).

7. “For I think you know, Charles, that the doors of this house have never been closed to all learned people” (Munich, Cod. Lat. 10383, f. 262r).

8. In the letter in the Munich collection referred to in note 4, Cod. Lat. 10383, f. 168r, for example, Nicolas Bourbon points out to Girolamo della Rovere that he is guilty of a false quantity in his hendecasyllabic verses: “Quos tu cum releges, in septimi reprehendes, iucundum, eo ex puncto, scribe, facetum. Nam in dictione, iucundum, primam esse productam non nescis” (“When you reread these verses, remove the word ‘iucundum’ at the end of the seventh line and write at that point ‘facetum’. For in the word ‘iucundum’, you are perfectly aware that the first syllable is long”).

10. This autograph letter is to be found in Cod. Lat. 10383, f. 233, in the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich.

11. In addition to the four children she gave birth to with Jean de Morel, she also had two children from her previous marriage, Joachim and Marie Dallier. Marie would marry Jean Mercier, who succeeded his master François Vatable as professor of Hebrew at the Collège royal in 1546.

12. Cod. Lat. 10383, f. 239r. On the back of this letter, f. 240v, Jean Morel has written: “Epistolae fragmentum mea ab uxore inchoatae ac in eius scrinij reliquijs post obitum repertae 1569.”


15. Cod. Lat. 10383, f. 130.


19. See Will, art. cit., pp. 103–4, and Munich Cod. Lat. 10383, ff. 250–51 and 279. At the end of the letter on f. 279, in a section not quoted by Will, Jeanne drops broad hints about getting her brother into the Morel household: “Est mihi Lutetiae frater germanus, vtinam ille per te in familia isthic pia alibi commendatus, potius quam viueret” (“I have a brother in Paris. I wish he could be entrusted there, through your agency, to the care of a pious family, rather than having to fend for himself”).

20. Munich, Cod. Lat. 10383, f. 266r. The letter is dated “Anno M. D. L. viij Mense Janu.” Though the letter refers to her as being “annorum vixdum septem, virguncula,” she must have been over eight, if the 1558 date is correct.

21. See note 14 for details.

22. Although Dorat suggests in the Tumulus that she and her sisters had to take on the duties of their mother when she died in 1567, this would not, of course, have included the time-consuming duties of raising children, but rather looking after their father: “[...] tu docta matre Camilla / Doctior, & soror huic Lucretia, tuque Diana, / Ante diem raptae fungentes munera matris,” ed. cit., p. 10.


24. See Will, art. cit., p. 117.