

## **Introduction: “C’est une femme qui parle”**

In recent years, critics and historians have recognized the crucial role played by cultural and literary *querelles* in shaping the period from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries in France. Topics of dispute ranged from theatre, through the relevance and superiority of ancient culture, to the animal soul. The ANR-funded project, “Agon,” run by Oxford and Paris-IV from 2011-2015, in particular, has brought to critical prominence the study of early modern *querelles*.<sup>1</sup> A *querelle*, which might also be known in French by a number of other terms, designating different categories, such as “controverse,” “dispute,” “guerre,” or “affaire,” and which does not quite map semantically onto the English word “quarrel”—note that the English version of the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes* is termed the “Battle of the Books”—was usually characterized by a series of similar features. It was normally recognized and even named at the time as a form of dispute; it involved written exchanges and some form of publicity, that is, a readership or audience, sometimes configured as a judge; and that for all that there were a number of discrete *querelles*, such as the *querelle du Cid* or the *querelle d’Alceste*, one *querelle* might also merge into or hide another (for instance, these could both be seen as versions of the *querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*).<sup>2</sup> A number of these disputes took women explicitly as their object, such as the well-known and long-standing *querelle des femmes*, in which, although it was dominated by men debating amongst themselves, women played an acknowledged role as speaking subjects.<sup>3</sup> Some *querelles* were provoked by women’s cultural productions, as in the case of the seventeenth-

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.agon.paris-sorbonne.fr>. This has led to some significant publications, namely: Alexis Tadié (“Theories”); Jeanne-Marie Hostiou and Tadié; Hostiou and Alain Viala; Anne-Lise Rey and Tadié; Paddy Bullard and Tadié. See also Bombart and Ferreyrolles.

<sup>2</sup> See Tadié, “Language of Quarrels”.

<sup>3</sup> On the medieval context, see Helen Swift; and for a recent study, see Domna Stanton. There is a large body of scholarship on this *querelle*: for an up-to-date bibliography, see the Société Internationale pour l’Étude des Femmes de l’Ancien Régime, <http://siefar.org>.

century quarrel about the novel. But what of women's roles in other *querelles*? And what did it mean to be a female quarreler?

The critical work to date on female quarrelers has, perhaps understandably, tended to focus on their engagement with the *querelle des femmes* and on its particular inflections, such as the *querelle des femmes savantes* about women's education of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century, involving female authors such as Madeleine de Scudéry, the Marquise de Lambert, and Gabrielle Suchon; or the *querelles* about the novel. Some of this critical work on the *querelle des femmes* has tested its limits, exploring its relationship to other disputes and arguing, for instance, that the *querelle des Anciens et des Modernes* was in fact a version of the *querelle des femmes* (DeJean, *Ancients against Moderns*); or questioning the historiographical methods of categorization present in this overarching label (Pellegrin). And, as I have argued elsewhere, *querelles* did not all possess the same value or capital: women may have used more culturally prestigious quarrels, such as the *querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*, as a platform for their interventions in the *querelle des femmes* (Taylor, "Ancients, Moderns, Gender").

Instead of treading the same ground, this Special Issue will address not "la querelle des femmes" and its limits, but rather "les femmes" and "les querelles." Women's interventions in quarrels *beyond* the *querelle des femmes* have yet to receive sustained critical attention and acknowledgement in their own right; and the methodological questions such interventions raise about our approaches to polemical writing also merit scrutiny. This Special Issue thus turns to a period which has not only been described as "un temps singulier de querelles" (Viala 5), but was a time in which women also had increased cultural authority and presence (Timmermans; Dufour-Maître, *Précieuses*). Although considerable attention has been paid to early modern women's contributions to philosophy and intellectual life, and so to their

engagement with questions under dispute, both in France and beyond, we are yet to conceptualize, in terms other than negative and misogynist, a woman who engaged in *querelles*, or what we are calling a “femme querelleuse.” By making French “querelles” our guiding framework, this Issue hopes to open this conversation.

In part this gap in scholarship can be accounted for by the difficulty entailed in establishing which texts by women might constitute an intervention in a quarrel: the gendered norms of early modern discourse meant that women were often discouraged from direct engagement in polemic. Polite, moderate and agreeable discourse was coded as feminine: women were not meant to quarrel. The philosopher, Pierre Bayle, regretted that Marie de Gournay had forayed into the controversial pamphlet war surrounding the Jesuits in the wake of the assassination of Henri IV in 1610, and sparked by Pierre Coton’s defence of the Jesuits, as it made her as an “easy target for male satire” (Conroy 53): “elle eût bien fait de ne pas écrire contre les partisans de l’Anticoton. Une personne de son sexe doit éviter soigneusement cette sorte de querelles” (586, vol. 2). Her interventions at the time triggered all manner of misogynist backlash: she was described as a “damoiselle carabine” in one such pamphlet (*Le Remercement* 12).<sup>4</sup> If women did engage in *querelles*, and especially if their opponents were male, they were often dismissed with the age-old *topos* of being “quarrelsome,” or “querelleuse” or “bilieuse,” sometimes dubbed, with classist inflection, a “harangère.” Literally a *marchande de poisson*, this term also comes to be defined figuratively: the *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française* definition reads: “une femme qui se plaît à quereller et à dire des injures”—much like the term “fishwife” in English.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See also, *L’Anti-Gournai, ou l’Anti-Gontier, servant de response a l’adieu de l’ame, fait par le pere Gontier sous le nom de la Damoiselle de Gournai* (n.p., n.d.).

<sup>5</sup> See Ronzeaud.

Marie de Gournay usefully schematizes the difficulties women faced in being taken seriously as polemicists. In her *Grief des dames* (1626), she writes: “eussent les Dames les raisons et les meditations de Carneades, 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 éloquence muette aura dit: ‘c’est une femme qui parle’” (1075). Based “de [s]a propre experience” (1075) she then picks out four ways in which men might dismiss women’s provocative or challenging speech:

1) By looking for a trivial pretext to divert attention away from the subject at hand to avoid being outsmarted, a “querelle d’Allemand”: “se sentant au secret du cœur mal ayguisé pour le combat, il faut qu’il trame querelle d’Allemand afin de fuir les coups” (1075).

2) By claiming that *bienséance* prevents them from quarreling with a woman, “un autre, s’arrestant par foiblesse à my-chemin, sous couleur de ne vouloir pas importuner une personne de nostre robe, sera dit victorieux et courtois ensemble. Un autre, derechef, bien qu’il estimast une femme capable de soustenir une dispute, ne croira pas que sa bien-séance luy permette de presenter un duel legitime à cet esprit” (1075);

3) By being oblivious, not considering a woman capable: “cestuy-la sera frappé, qui n’a pas l’entendement de discerner le coup rué d’une main feminine” (1076);

4) By mocking her: “et tel autre le discerne et le sent, qui pour l’éluder tourne le discours en risee, ou bien en escopetterie de caquet perpetual” (1076).

In all these cases, the result is that men always win: “ainsi pour emporter le prix, il suffit à ces messieurs d’esquiver le combat” (1077).

Gournay’s schema proves useful for approaching early modern women’s negotiations of the arena of a *querelle*. Gournay, as Derval Conroy explores in this Issue, was in fact bold in her identity as polemicist. However, to navigate such scenarios, many of the women analyzed here often deployed strategies of circumvention resulting in rhetorically indirect

“interventions” in quarrels, making them more difficult to establish as such. Such indirect interventions include writing in genres not necessarily recognized as polemical (novels, incidental verse, private letters rather than essays or treatises), or denying that they were having an argument at all. The very feminization of irenic or moderate discourse was also a strategy deployed by women in what Dufour-Maître describes as a paradoxical means of achieving authority by refusing to assume the weighty position of “author” (“Jalons” 263).

As Gournay also implies, women’s interventions in *querelles* were also often rendered marginal to the core corpus of a given quarrel because they failed to provoke a reaction. Clément di Clemente’s piece in this Issue on Mlle de Beaulieu’s intervention in the early seventeenth-century quarrels about theatre is a salient case in point. Women were thus reduced to commentators or observers but were not core participants, which inherently complicates the status of their texts as being part of a *querelle*.<sup>6</sup> For instance, although many women contributed in myriad ways to the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*, often, for example, in novels, incidental verse, and fairy tales, rather than in genres more readily perceived as *querelle* texts, they were often not received, or responded to, as quarrel participants. The early eighteenth-century case of Anne Dacier, vocal and acknowledged defender of the ancients in the second phase of that *querelle*, the *querelle d’Homère*, proves remarkable in terms of the relative openness with which she engaged in this quarrel, was acknowledged as a legitimate opponent at the time, and has since been understood as a quarreler, even though, as Myriam Dufour-Maître shows in her contribution to this Issue, Dacier was not exempt from ridicule in history’s assessment of the *querelle*.<sup>7</sup> The marginalization of female participants has also been an effect of literary history in the

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<sup>6</sup> For an example, see Frédérique Aït-Touati.

<sup>7</sup> On Dacier’s role in the Homer Quarrel, see Norman (215–18) and Taylor, “Anne Dacier’s Rhetoric”.

documentation of *querelles*: for instance, Augustin Simon Iraitlh mentions only Anne Dacier in his section on “La Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes” (305–19, vol. 2); this is repeated by more recent bibliographies of this *querelle* (Ferreyrolles; Hostiou). Because, therefore, of their indirect authorial postures and/or their marginalizing reception, women as quarrelers prove an unstable and challenging object of study.

This Special Issue will confront that challenge and argue for the necessity of paying heed to the many subtle and complex ways in which women in early modern France engaged in quarrels, not only about their sex, but also about matters of culture, science, and religion. This work is particularly timely not only due to the recent critical interest in *querelles*, ongoing work in early modern gender studies, and attention to women’s roles in legal and social disputes, but also due to the current mainstream feminist movements like #MeToo, which have brought to the fore problems concerning contemporary women’s polemical speech in public.

In taking this approach, we build on the work by historians and critics who have mentioned women’s interventions in various *querelles*, often discussing this in passing as part of a wider discussion of women’s voices in the public sphere. Timmermans (157, 168–70) and Dufour-Maître (*Précieuses* 275–300), for instance, analyze the *querelles* of the 1640s, notably that over *I Suppositi* of Ariosto, dominated by Jean Chapelain, Guez de Balzac and Vincent Voiture, that the “*précieuses*” of the Hôtel de Rambouillet also engaged in. DeJean (*Tender Geographies* 161–81) and Natalie Grande (368–81) have shown us how women’s novels, not typically *querelle* texts, might contain quarreling gestures. Lewis Seifert (91–97), and more recently, Sophie Raynard, have considered similar gestures by those writing fairy tales. By bringing attention to the many ways in which women engaged in *querelles*, even if their very participation might at times challenge some of the ways in which we define *querelles*, we

probe questions of method, categorization, and documentation. We suggest that this approach entails a shifting of perspective to include non-traditional *querelle* texts in our analysis of polemic, just as Katharine Hamerton has done in relation to the value of salon women's ideas to the history of ideas, as she calls for the inclusion of "nontraditional intellectual-history sources" in the study of intellectual history (213).

This collection of essays not only brings together a series of case studies detailing women's engagement in a range of quarrels, but it also hopes to make a coherent case for the activity of female polemicists by explicitly uniting a range of authors and texts under this common framework. We do not claim to be exhaustive or even to include all the major "femmes querelleuses" (missing are the Marquise de Lambert, Marie-Jeanne Riccoboni, Madame de Genlis, among others...) Nor do we suggest that "les femmes" studied here, or those of the early modern period more widely, conceived of themselves as a collective. Instead, articles probe common concerns: how did women write polemically and negotiate the expectations of their gender? How might women enter into a *querelle*, given its regulated and gendered rhetorical practices? What did women gain by quarreling; and do their interventions suggest that engagement with *querelles* conferred literary/cultural authority? What is the relationship, if there is one at all, between women's engagement with various quarrels and the *querelle des femmes*? Does the study of female quarrelers affect our methods of approaching quarrels and polemical discourse?

The articles analyze authors from the mid-sixteenth to the late eighteenth centuries, some well-known to posterity, others more marginalized (authors include: Madeleine des Roches; Marie de Gournay; Mlle de Beaulieu; Madeleine de Scudéry; Marquise de Sablé; Antoinette Deshoulières; Marie-Jeanne l'Héritier, Anne Dacier; Adelaïde d'Espinassy; Joséphine de Montbart; Anne de Miremont; Constance de Salm). Attention is paid to the documentation

and historical reconstruction of a *querelle*, particularly in the two articles that frame this collection: Dufour-Maître's opening essay examines women's interventions in the *querelles galantes* of late seventeenth-century France, attending to the complexity of these gestures at the time and considering how such roles were either dismissed or caricatured in subsequent historiography. Catriona Seth's closing essay analyses an author's own retrospective construction of their role in a *querelle*. Seth argues that Constance de Salm's reconstructed her role in the *querelle des femmes poètes* of the late eighteenth century as more decisive than it in fact was; in the *Œuvres Complètes* she published several decades later, she depicted her intervention as the triumphant last word. Elena Russo's *Postface* sees Constance de Salm's success in lending legitimacy to her adversarial stance to be exceptional, not only because of her gender, but also because, Russo claims, literary quarrels had come to acquire negative connotations according to the rules of eighteenth-century sociability, so that, from the mid-1750s, both women and men were discouraged from tarnishing their reputations by entering the fray, even if a quarrel might also simultaneously grant a writer important publicity.

In the intervening essays, contributors place their female writers in the context of an established quarrel and analyze the nature and implications of their engagement, stressing the importance of taking the polemical stance of the authors studied seriously: Clemente analyses Mlle de Beaulieu's unacknowledged and all but forgotten 1603 interventions in the *querelle de la moralité du théâtre*; Conroy explores Gournay's contributions to the debates about religious confession and laxism versus rigorism; my own contribution treats Deshoulières's engagement with the Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns and debates about the *bête-machine*; Lise Forment examines how Marie-Jeanne l'Héritier intervenes in the Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns under the shadow of her uncle Charles Perrault; and Gemma Tidman explores three women's interventions in eighteenth-century debates about boys' education. Other contributors use women's interventions to test the parameters of what we

understand a *querelle* to mean: Seifert argues that the insistence on a public might exclude women who often engaged in private or semi-private conflicts. He explores this using the case of the Marquise de Sablé, drawing our attention to how (sometimes fraught) friendships might intersect with institutions such as publishing and convents. Herdman focuses on the legal definition of *querelle* and examines how Madeleine des Roches's objections to quarreling serve paradoxically to engage in both the *querelle des femmes* and in a "never fully formalized" *querelle* protesting women's exclusion from the law. We come to see how women often worked the *querelle des femmes* into their interventions on other matters; to examine the rhetorical strategies women used; and to reflect on what these case studies reveal about approaches to polemical writing and how we might document or even define a *querelle*.

As a whole, the Special Issue addresses three main points. Firstly, it analyzes how women's interventions in specific quarrels foreground the regulated, relational, and male-dominated power structures that policed and governed entry into the public sphere and remind us that the domain of a quarrel was not a space of even access. Secondly, and relatedly, it provokes reflection on the critical methods we use to delineate any given quarrel and its corpus, exploring the tension between the need for an endogenous approach and the risk of rehearsing such male-dominated power structures which often sidelined women's quarreling gestures. Thirdly, it uses quarreling as a lens through which to analyze the rhetorical tactics that women employed to express dissent; and aims to apply this lens to the much-studied authorial strategies of female writers, by examining the opposition between the possible legitimacy, or at least publicity, gained by entering a quarrel and the need to negotiate a hostile reception.

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