



Research Repository UCD

Title	A Defence and Illustration of Marie de Gournay: Bayle's Reception of 'Cette Savante Demoiselle'
Authors(s)	Conroy, Derval
Publication date	2019-09-27
Publication information	Conroy, Derval. "A Defence and Illustration of Marie de Gournay: Bayle's Reception of 'Cette Savante Demoiselle.'" Oxford University Press, September 27, 2019. https://doi.org/10.1093/frebul/ktz009 .
Publisher	Oxford University Press
Item record/more information	http://hdl.handle.net/10197/12467
Publisher's statement	This is a pre-copyedited, author-produced PDF of an article accepted for publication in French Studies Bulletin following peer review. The definitive publisher-authenticated version: Derval Conroy, A Defence and Illustration of Marie de Gournay: Bayle's Reception of 'Cette Savante Demoiselle', French Studies Bulletin, Volume 40, Issue 152, Winter 2019, Pages 51–54, is available online at: https://doi.org/10.1093/frebul/ktz009
Publisher's version (DOI)	10.1093/frebul/ktz009

Downloaded 2025-12-04 22:55:07

The UCD community has made this article openly available. Please share how this access benefits you. Your story matters! (@ucd_oa)



© Some rights reserved. For more information

ARTICLE

A DEFENCE AND ILLUSTRATION OF MARIE DE GOURNAY: BAYLE'S RECEPTION OF 'CETTE SAVANTE DEMOISELLE'

DERVAL CONROY, University College Dublin

The assassination of Henri IV by François Ravallac in 1610 sparked an immediate pamphlet polemic regarding the Jesuits and their position in France. First in the fray was the *Lettre déclamatoire* by the assassinated king's Jesuit confessor Pierre Coton, which triggered the anti-Jesuit satire *L'Anti-Coton*. Amongst other replies, Marie de Gournay's pro-Jesuit text *Adieu de l'ame du roy de France et de Navarre Henry le Grand à la Royne, avec la Defence des Peres Jesuistes* appeared at this point, shortly followed by *Le Remercement des Beurrières de Paris*, the latter of which treats of Gournay as a public woman.¹ At the other end of the century, in a passage frequently cited as an indication of disapproval of female participation in general in socio-political public controversy, and as a criticism of Marie de Gournay in particular for the same, Pierre Bayle writes in the main body of the article devoted to Gournay in his *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (1697), with reference to the *Adieu*: '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.'² Taken in isolation (as it has been), the comment might seem unequivocal, typical of the deep-rooted and widespread (although not unchallenged) censure of the very articulation of a female voice in the public sphere that marked the period.³ But when replaced in the immediate context of the observations that directly precede and follow it, viewed in the context of the entry on Gournay as a whole, and, above all, read in the light of the overarching *Dictionnaire* project, this interpretation appears questionable.⁴ In keeping with the aim at the heart of the *Dictionnaire* to unmask error, Bayle juxtaposes conflicting images of Gournay and conflicting anecdotes concerning her, both implicitly inviting the reader to exercise *bon sens* in their judgement and explicitly highlighting the unlikelihood of certain tales by their very co-existence. While such juxtaposition necessitates lengthy citation, of both positive and negative representations, the cited passages need to be read in the light of the comments that accompany them. The aim of this article is to (re-)examine Bayle's reception of Marie de Gournay, in light both of his historiographical practice, and of the lexical nuances of the word *querelle*.

In his article, Bayle manages to sketch very succinctly the radical divergence in contemporary views of Gournay. The first disparaging image with which he takes issue emerges from an alleged exchange between Thomas Pelletier (1598?–1628?) and the cardinal Jacques Davy Du Perron (1556–1618), as recounted in the *Perroniana* (first published in 1667), which manages to resurrect the casting of Gournay as a prostitute while simultaneously suggesting that her unattractive physical appearance would have made such activity unlikely. Bayle characterizes this anecdote of Du Perron's as 'un trait fort desobligeant', and casts the mockery of her physical appearance as 'une mortelle offense', '[un] sanglant outrage' which would have tested 'la vertu de plus grands Saints'. Du Perron, Bayle insists, 'poussoit l'insulte au delà de toutes sortes de limites'. Moreover, not only does he castigate Du Perron for his offensive remarks, which he clearly views as inappropriate and insulting, but he also counters the cutting implications regarding Gournay's physical appearance by a double hypothesis and the use of the pluperfect subjunctive (marked by 'encore que' and 'au cas où'), refusing therefore to propagate unchallenged the clichéd portrait of her in circulation. In sum, Bayle's recounting of the anecdote serves to cast Du

Perron rather than Gournay in a poor light. His critical tone is again apparent later in his word choice as he upbraids the opponents of the Jesuits as having ‘insulté notre pucelle’ (a designation possibly chosen for its resonances with Jeanne d’Arc, in addition to undercutting the image of the public woman) in a second injurious pamphlet which targeted Gournay, known as the *Anti-Gournay* (a pamphlet which is still today repeatedly confused with the *Remerciment*).⁵

The second image Bayle unpicks falls into the realm of the private sphere and concerns two radically contrasting anecdotes concerning Gournay’s friendship with the poet Racan. One, taken from a *Recueil des bons mots* (1693), presents a typical caricatural image of Gournay; the second, taken from the *Menagiana* (also 1693), throws into relief a witty repartee between the two writers and implies a mutual ease and respect. Juxtaposing the two highlights the improbability of either. Both are discredited as ever-changing tales of gossip.

Throughout the article, Bayle also discredits these sources of satirical or caricatural myth more discreetly by pointing to their careless inaccuracies: we learn that there is an error in the title of the pamphlet referred to in the *Perroniana*; the author of the *Remerciment des beurrières* wrongly represents Gournay’s age (she is 45 not 55); Étienne Pasquier is marshalled as a source to prove that the author of the *Recueil des bons mots* is mistaken regarding Gournay’s origins (she is Parisian, not Gascon).⁶

The dominant tone of the article is one of profound esteem, which implicitly reinforces these criticisms of the critics: Gournay is referred to as ‘docte’, ‘[une] savante Demoiselle’, ‘célèbre par son Savoir’, represented as being respected by the literati of her time, well received by the highest echelons of the nobility, and in regular receipt of a small court pension. Bayle drily hints at a certain hypocrisy on Du Perron’s part with the ironic reminder that the cardinal’s ‘raillerie piquante’ did not prevent him from esteeming this ‘savante Demoiselle’, since ‘il est dans le Catalogue de ceux qui lui ont donné des louanges’. A lengthy quotation from Michel de Marolles’s *Mémoires* (1656) allows Bayle to highlight the multiplicity and rank of both public figures (including Richelieu and Pierre Séguier) and men of letters (such as Justus Lipsius, La Mothe le Vayer, and of course Montaigne) who accorded her their respect.⁷

It is directly following these reminders of respect and court favour that the apparent criticism regarding Gournay and her participation in *querelles* cited above appears, a comment which crucially is in turn followed by the observation: ‘Les Ecrivains satiriques sont des rustres qui ne gardent point de mesures. Ils attaquent les femmes par l’endroit le plus sensible.’ The marginal note *Rustica progenies nescit habere modum* points to the classical origin of the sentiment. To my mind, key to appreciating this remark is the qualification ‘*cette sorte de querelles*’ (my emphasis). On the one hand, the construction of the public sphere in general as an exclusively masculine domain—and even more specifically so in relation to political debate concerning a male religious order and regicide—would suggest that Bayle is recommending that women have no place in such a political controversy. That may well be what he is arguing, in which case his apparent exclusion of women from the public sphere is of a narrow application and not necessarily relevant to other spheres (as we will see below, regarding Gournay’s involvement in linguistics polemics). But I would suggest that there is another connotation to ‘*cette sorte de querelle*’ which narrows the field even further.

In his sophisticated analysis of the lexicon of ‘querelles, disputes, contestations’ in the usual dictionaries of the time (Richelet, Furetière, the *Académie française*), Alain Viala points to a number of distinctions which can be seen to emerge, particularly in Richelet, despite the circulatory, self-referential nature of the definitions. While the term *dispute* corresponds in particular to ‘une pratique du débat contradictoire et ordonné, en forme d’argumentation raisonnée, entre lettrés’, the word *querelle* ‘suit une tendance inverse’.⁸ For Richelet, for example, a *querelle* corresponds to a ‘prise qu’on a avec quelqu’un, soit de paroles ou autrement; [...] démêlé;’ *se quereller* signifies ‘se dire des injures, se dire des choses desobligeantes’. I would argue that Bayle’s use of the word *querelles* here refers to an aggressive and offensive type of controversy, an idea that is reinforced by his designation of satirists as *rustres*. The entry for *rustre* in Furetière refers the reader to *rustaut*, which is defined as ‘[celui] qui est rude, incivil, et mal poli’. Bayle’s criticism is not of Gournay but of the uncivil *rustres*, who know no bounds, and who attack women by attacking their reputation. Read this way, the words ‘Elle eût bien fait’ appear not as a reproach or criticism, but rather as a regret (implicit in the use of the pluperfect subjunctive), a lament for this woman of letters whose foray into political debate (with a stance entirely vindicated by historians today) made of her an easy target for male satire. The suggestion is not necessarily therefore, I would argue, that women should not participate in debates, but rather that they should avoid the type of offensive controversy such as that played out in scurrilous pamphlet warfare, dominated by base misogyny, where the female voice is invariably silenced and supplanted by the objectification of woman in sexual terms. (It is worth remembering that satire has long been recognized not only as ‘a literature of power and attack’ but as ‘radically masculinist, [...] a form of power exerted frequently against women’).⁹

The final element in Bayle’s defence of Gournay, and a clear intimation of support for her stance in the philological controversies of the early seventeenth century, comes in the commentary that Bayle added to the second edition of the *Dictionnaire* in 1702. Several of Gournay’s writings overtly defend the ideals of the Pléiade and oppose Malherbe’s reforms of the French language.¹⁰ In implicit support, Bayle firstly reproduces a lengthy passage from Sorel’s *De la connoissance de bons livres* (1671), in which Sorel lauds Gournay for her *générosité* and *bonté* as well as her erudition, and recommends that those too young to have had the opportunity to converse with her read her work *Les Advis ou les Presens de la Demoiselle de Gournay* (her complete works, which first appeared in 1634).¹¹ Secondly, Bayle articulates his own stance in support of hers:

Mais tout bien considéré, cette Demoiselle n’avoit pas autant de tort qu’on l’on s’imagine, & il seroit à souhaiter que les Autheurs les plus illustres de ce temps-là fussent vigoureusement oposez à la proscription de plusieurs mots qui n’ont rien de rude, & qui serviroient à varier l’expression, à éviter les consonances, les vers, et les équivoques.¹²

In a final gesture, he appeals to the ideas and practices of well-respected voices of his own time (La Bruyère, Bossuet, Fléchier) whose stance and linguistic usages retrospectively validate Gournay’s opinions.

Much recent scholarship has been devoted to restoring Marie de Gournay to her rightful place in the republic of letters.¹³ Yet paradoxically many of those most committed to rehabilitating her work and her reputation continue to quote, with understandable ire, disparaging anecdotes that circulated in her regard. Bayle’s article devotes considerable space to favourable readings of Gournay’s legacy, both by her contemporaries and by himself, pitching respected sources against anonymous pamphlets and gossipy *recueils*; but his efforts

appear to have gone largely unnoticed, as his dictionary entry tends to be viewed together with those of other historical dictionaries of the time (such as Louis Moréri's, which is primarily biographical), despite their considerable differences. Yet what Bayle undertakes is nothing less than a *défense et illustration* of Marie de Gournay. To ignore the positive slant of his *Dictionnaire* entry is to do justice neither to him nor to the 'savante Demoiselle' herself.

¹ The injurious treatment of Gournay in the *Remerciment* (regarding which she sought to take legal action, as recounted in the Du Perron anecdote which Bayle cites) no doubt contributed to her decision not to republish the lengthy section devoted to the defence of the Jesuits in the later editions of her works in 1626, 1634 and 1641. The original 1610 *Adieu* can be consulted in Marie de Gournay, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Jean-Claude Arnould et al., 2 vols (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2002), Vol. 1, pp. 191–236. A number of articles have been devoted to this text, most notably Michèle Fogel, 'La Damoiselle de Gournay, qui a tousjours bien servi au public', in *Les Femmes et l'écriture de l'histoire, 1400-1800*, eds Sylvie Steinberg and Jean-Claude Arnould (Rouen: Publications des Universités de Rouen et du Havre, 2008), pp. 205–17; and Claude-Gilbert Dubois, 'Autour de l'*Adieu de l'ame du roy Henry de France* (1610) de Marie de Gournay,' *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 25.3 (1995), 477–87. For the broader context of slander and satire, and Gournay's place within it, see Emily Butterworth, *Poisoned Words: Slander and Satire in Early Modern France* (Oxford: Legenda, 2006), pp. 60–75.

² Pierre Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, 4 vols (Rotterdam: Reinier Leers, 1697), Vol. 2, p. 1275.

³ See, for example, Elyane Dezon-Jones, *Fragments d'un discours féminin* (Paris: José Corti, 1988), p. 41. Marie-Thérèse Noiset sees in Bayle's article more generally a failure to do justice to the writer; see 'Marie de Gournay et le caprice des siècles', *Études françaises*, 29.3 (1993), 193–205 (p. 200).

⁴ On the *Dictionnaire* as a 'Chasse aux fautes', see Ruth Whelan, *The Anatomy of Superstition: A Study of the Historical Theory and Practice of Pierre Bayle* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1989), pp. 119–21.

⁵ Confusion of the two pamphlets has resulted in the conflation of titles in modern scholarship. The *Remerciment des Beurrières* (Niort, 1610) is often referred to as *Le Remerciment des Beurrières de Paris ou l'Anti-Gournay*, no doubt since that is the title under which it appears in Constant Venesoen's edition of the pamphlet in *Marie de Gournay: Textes relatifs à la calomnie* (Tübingen: Narr, 1998), although he refers to it in the *notice* as 'un' *Anti-Gournay*. However, the text entitled *L'Anti-Gournai* in circulation at the time, and to which Bayle is referring, is an entirely different text, the full title of which runs *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.). Venesoen draws on Adrien Baillet's *Jugement des Sçavans* in his discussion, but Baillet in fact refers to two distinct texts (see *Jugemens des Savans*, 8 vols (Amsterdam, 1725), Vol. 7, pp. 42 and 50–51). The recent *Œuvres complètes* do not mention the *L'Anti-Gournai, ou l'Anti-Gontier*, which, unlike the *Remerciment*, appears to be a very rare text. (A copy of it is held in the Biblioteca Casanatense in Rome). It was published together with the *Remerciment* and the *Anti-Coton* the following year in *Divers Traitez sur l'Estat de France... Anti-Coton, Anti-Gournai, & les Beurrieres* (Montpellier, 1611).

⁶ Given that Gascon origins were despised in some circles at the time, Bayle may have been particularly keen to correct this detail.

⁷ The passage Bayle cites can be found in *Mémoires de Michel de Marolles, abbé de Villeloin* (Paris: Antoine de Sommaville, 1656), p. 58.

⁸ Alain Viala, 'Un temps de querelles', *Littératures classiques*, 81.2 (2013), 5–22 (p. 10).

⁹ Brian A. Connery and Kirk Combe, 'Theorizing Satire: A Retrospective and Introduction', in *Theorizing Satire: Essays in Literary Criticism*, eds Brian A. Connery and Kirk Combe (London: Macmillan, 1995), pp. 11–12.

¹⁰ On Gournay's linguistic writings, see in particular Giovanna Devincenzo, 'Marie le Jars de Gournay: Une linguiste sur les pas de la Pléiade', in *Des mots et des femmes à l'origine de la langue française, XVI^e–XVII^e siècles* (Paris: Hermann, 2018), pp. 41–74.

¹¹ The passage Bayle cites can be found on pp. 418–19 of the 1672 Amsterdam edition of Sorel's text.

¹² Pierre Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique, Seconde edition*, 3 vols (Rotterdam: Reinier Leers, 1702), Vol. 2, p. 1372.

¹³ See, for example, Carol Pal, *Republic of Women: Rethinking the Republic of Letters in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017 [2012]), pp. 78–97.