In *Papers on French Seventeenth Century Literature*, 67 (2007), 443-464
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The displacement of disorder: gynæcocracy and friendship in Catherine Bernard's *Laodamie* (1689)

It should come as no surprise that the world of Catherine Bernard's tragedies is one of disorder: theatre is after all, as d'Aubignac tells us, '[là] où règne le Démon de l'inquiétude, du trouble et du désordre'.[1] Disorder is a characteristic of the genre; it is a state of affairs rectified by the *dénouement*, ensuring that the spectators depart, in the words of Corneille, 'l'esprit en repos'.[2] Bernard's play *Laodamie* might appear at first glance, within the framework of a traditional patriarchal paradigm, to provide the perfect recipe for disorder: firstly the sovereign ruler is a woman, and secondly both she and her sister are in love with the same man. However, it soon becomes apparent that the focus of that disorder is displaced away from where we might expect to see it. The aim of this article is to analyse this displacement of disorder as it manifests itself in the inextricably linked public and private spheres. Such an analysis will enable us to evaluate the innovations central to this neglected, once highly successful, tragedy.[3]

Popular disorder and gynæcocracy

[1] Aubignac, abbé d', *La Pratique du théâtre,* [1657], ed. Hélène Baby (Paris: Champion, 2000), livre 4, ch. 4, p. 430.

[2] Pierre Corneille, 'Discours de l'utilité et des parties du poéme dramatique', in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. III, éd. Georges Couton, coll. Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), p. 125.

[3] While Bernard's tragedy *Brutus* (1691) has recently been the subject of a number of articles, *Laodamie* remains somewhat overlooked. Articles which include a section on it include Henriette Goldwyn, 'Catherine Bernard ou la voix dramatique éclatée', in Roger Duchêne et Pierre Ronzeaud, éds, *Ordre et contestation au temps des classiques,* 2 vols, coll. Biblio 17, 73 (Paris-Seattle-Tübingen: PFSCL, 1992), I, pp. 203-211 and her 'Femmes auteurs dramatiques au dix-septième siècle: la condition inhumaine', *Cahiers du dix-septième,* 4:1 (1990), 51-62; Perry Gethner, 'Melpomene Meets Women Playwrights in the Age of Louis XIV', *Neophilologus*, 72 (1988) 17-33; Marie-France Hilgar, 'Les Tragédies de Catherine Bernard,' in Ginette Adamson and Eunice Myers, eds, *Continental, Latin-American and Francophone Women Writers*, Vol. II (Lanham, MD, University Press of America, 1990), pp. 107-114; Derval Conroy, 'Tragic ambiguities: gender and sovereignty in French classical drama' in Christine Meek, ed., *Women in Renaissance and Early Modern Europe* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000) pp. 185-204. See also Alain Niderst, *Fontenelle à la recherche de lui-même (1657-1702)* (Paris: Nizet, 1972), pp. 425-428. (As the title of this volume implies, in Niderst's opinion, a considerable part of Bernard's work was written by Fontenelle. While there is no doubt that Fontenelle may have played the common role of mentor to the young writer, no concrete evidence exists to indicate the extent of any would-be collaboration, which was first evoked in the 1730s, at the time of a literary controversy involving Voltaire). The neglect of Catherine Bernard has recently been addressed by the inclusion of *Laodamie* in Perry Gethner, éd., *Femmes dramaturges en France (1650-1750). Pièces choisies* coll. Biblio 17, 79 (Paris-Seattle-Tübingen: PFSCL, 1994), pp. 191-242, and particularly by the publication of her complete works by Franco Piva. See Franco Piva, éd., *Catherine Bernard. Œuvres*, 2 vols. Vol 1: *Romans et nouvelles* (Fasano/ Paris: Schena/Didier Érudition, 1993); Vol 2: *Théâtre et poésie* (Fasano/ Paris: Schena/Didier Érudition, 1999). Analyses of *Laodamie* are included in both editions. See Gethner, éd., pp. 183-190, and Piva, éd., pp. 31-59. A third edition of both of Bernard's tragedies is to appear in 2007, edited by me, in *Théâtre de femmes, XVI^e^-XVIII^e^ siècle. Anthologie*, Vol. 3, sous la dir. d'Aurore Evain, Henriette Goldwyn, Perry Gethner, Publications de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, coll. 'La cité des dames'. All quotations in this article are from Gethner's edition.

A recurrent theme in many of the political writings of the time, particularly those concerning Salic Law, is the association of gynæcocracy (government by women) and disorder. This association is sustained both by the accumulation of essentialisms which constructs generic Woman as weak, lascivious, ambitious, inconstant, false, power-hungry (what Sarah Hanley calls the *defamation litany*[4]) and by the construction of sovereignty itself as a male prerogative, necessitating certain 'masculine' virtues. According to Richelieu,

> il est vrai qu'ordinairement leur mollesse les rend incapables d'une vertu mâle, nécessaire à l'administration, et qu'il est presque impossible que leur gouvernement soit exempt ou de bassesse ou de diminution, dont la foiblesse de leur sexe est la cause ou d'injustice et de cruauté, dont le dérèglement de leurs passions, qui leur tient lieu de raison, est la vraie source.[5]

Later in the century Jean François Senault comments,

> [un assez grand nombre de Politiques] se persuadent que les femmes non seulement ne peuvent soûtenir les travaux qui accompagnent la Souveraineté; mais [...] quand elles y sont admises ou appelées leur conduite est ambitieuse et cruelle; et tenant quelque chose de ce serpent qui séduisit leur première mère, elles sont fatales à leur Empire et funestes à leurs sujets.[6]

The exclusionist discourse, upheld by a considerable body of juridico-political writings, hinges, for the most part, on a shifting dynamic between what women 'are' and what they 'are not'. It is not surprising that these ideas are transferred into the dramatic representations of the time: jealous shrews and lovelorn ineffectual maidens make up a large portion of the *reines régnantes* encountered in the fifty odd plays which I have identified which treat of gynæcocracy.[7] A more favourable portrait is encountered in the figure of the battling Amazon or warrior queen who appropriates with ease the signifiers of male identity. Often capable and intelligent, the warrior queen goes a certain way towards transcending gender distinctions and carves a certain space for female governance, a theme which is usually explicitly discussed in the plays concerned.[8] In the case of Catherine

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[4] Sarah Hanley, 'Identity Politics and Rulership in France: Female Political Place and the Fraudulent Salic Law in Christine de Pizan and Jean de Montreuil', in Michael Wolfe, ed., *Changing Identities in Early Modern France* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996), pp. 78-94 (p. 82).

[5] Richelieu, *Testament politique ou Les Maximes d'Etat de Monsieur le Cardinal de Richelieu* (Paris: Complexe, 1990), pp. 33.

[6] Jean-François Senault, *Le Monarque ou les devoirs du souverain* (Paris: P. Le Petit, 1661), pp. 43-44. Cardin Le Bret evokes similar reasons why queen consorts should be excluded from power: 'Il serait fort dangereux que les Femmes de cette qualité eussent une puissance égale à leurs marys, d'autant que leur naturel ambitieux ne les laisse jamais en repos qu'elles n'ayent usurpé les advantages du commandement souverain, et reduit en fin leurs marys sous leur empire'. Cardin Le Bret, *De la souveraineté du Roy* (Paris: J. Quesnel, 1632), p. 43.

[7] This study is part of a larger book project which I am currently completing entitled *Ruling Women. Gender, Government and Sovereignty in Seventeenth-Century France*.

[8] See Derval Conroy, 'Mapping gender transgressions? Representations of the warrior woman in seventeenth-century tragedy (1642-1660)' in Richard Hodgson, éd., *La Femme au XVII^e^*, coll. Biblio 17 (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 2002), pp. 243-254.

Bernard, however, there is no explicit discussion concerning gynæcocracy, nor is there any swash-buckling, but the dramatist allows for the possibility of female political virtue (without military prowess) in the figure of the rational female sovereign, torn by the same conflicts as any heroic king figure.

The plot of the play is quite straightforward. Laodamie, queen of Épire, is bound by her late father's will and testament to marry neighbouring prince Attale. Determined to obey her father's wishes, she is nonetheless torn between her duty and her love of Gélon, an exiled prince of Sicily. To assist her in overcoming her love of Gélon, she has organised for him to marry her sister Nérée (in a gesture possibly inspired by Corneille's Infanta of *Le Cid*). However, when her fiancé is killed in Act 1.5 (by the power-hungry Sostrate as becomes later apparent), she is suddenly free to marry Gélon herself if she wishes. Will she betray her sister's love by now claiming Gélon for herself? The situation is all the more complicated by the fact that her people never cease to demand this union with the hero Gélon.

Faced with this dilemma, Laodamie is portrayed as an honorable monarch, buffeted by the implications of her decision, and at times emotionally distraught, but nonetheless a queen whose main concern is the government and well-being of her State, and whose actions and attitudes are guided by a sense of loyalty and duty to her people. Her legitimate right to the throne is never questioned: reference is made to '[le] trône où le Ciel [la] fit naître' (l. 153), to '[ses] droits sacrés' (l. 1314).[9] These comments situate the play at a considerable remove from the discourse which constructs government by women as unnatural or illegal. Furthermore, when Gélon hints to Laodamie herself that Attale will be the one to hold the power after his marriage to her, she is clearly offended and indicates by the tone of her reply that she sees no contradiction between gynæcocracy and the patriarchal institution of marriage (ll. 163-165). (She later refers to Gélon's innuendo as 'un soupçon mal fondé' (l. 191)). The political disorder which marks the play, then, does not stem from any innate 'female' weakness, or any would-be 'female' nature. The kernel of the disorder is displaced away from the female sovereign, and lies instead with her rebellious people. More specifically, it lies with the association of sovereignty with the traditionally male virtue of military prowess. Each time her possible marriage and the popular demands are referred to, it is not framed in terms of the need for male rationale, male judgement, male tutelage (although that is an obvious corollary), as we find in the majority of other plays of the period which treat of the question: instead, it is evoked specifically and uniquely in terms of military strength. The queen herself acknowledges this twice in a general sense. Early in the play she comments, 'mon sceptre demande / Que le bras d'un époux l'appuie et le défende' (ll. 17-18). After the revelation of the declaration of war in Act III.6, this need becomes more pressing: as she remarks:

> L'on a besoin d'un roi, vous le voyez assez.
> La guerre dont encor nous somme menacés,
> Par un roi seulement peut être soutenue;
> Un roi seul peut calmer la populace émue. (ll. 1221-1224)

[9] See also l. 1360.

That general necessity for a king translates itself among the people as a desire to place Gélon in particular on the throne, a desire initially articulated in Act II.7 by the minister of State, Phénix, who for reasons of self-interest also wishes to see Gélon king. Three times he expresses the people's wishes:

> Pour Gélon dès ce jour le peuple se déclare… (l. 514)
>
> Le peuple pour Gélon a pris cette chaleur… (l. 524)
>
> A monter sur le trône un grand peuple l'invite… (l. 537)

Following the declaration of war, references to the people (often in terms of popular unrest) double in frequency[10] and, as the dramatic tension heightens, the spectators are left in no doubt as to the pressure the queen is under (an idea which must be taken into consideration when examining the queen's motivation to act in Acts IV and V). The growing importance of the people is reflected in Phénix' speech in Act V.i, where in his growing frustration with Gélon's refusal to consider the throne, he moves from allusion to the demands of 'le peuple', to 'tout l'Etat', to '*les* peuples' (see ll. 1186-1199, my emphasis).

These demands made by the people, and the attention given to them, are noteworthy in themselves.[11] While no political question is as rehearsed in the early modern period as that concerning the exact nature of the relation between sovereign and subject, and their respective duties and rights, it is clear that the debate is more heated at times of religious or civil strife. Extremely topical during the sixteenth-century wars of religion, the role of the people is once again the subject of heated debate in the latter half of the seventeenth century, particularly in the period surrounding the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685.[12] This emphasis on the people has led some critics to question whether the play can be read as an explicit comment on popular sovereignty and more specifically on the 1688 Glorious Revolution.[13] While it is too reductionist to read the text as a reflection of events in England,[14] or indeed of any specific events or specific opinions, the role given

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[10] War is announced in line 755: there are eleven references to *le peuple* prior to this and twenty four following it.

[11] As Niderst puts it, 'le personnage principal est peut-être le peuple, invisible, mais tout puissant; inquiet, vite échauffé, vite apaisé…' (Niderst, *op. cit*., p. 426).

[12] At the very time of the creation of *Laodamie*, Bossuet and Jurieu, for example, were embroiled in controversy. While Bossuet upheld an absolutist theory which allowed little space for popular intervention, exiled Huguenot Jurieu supported both the idea of a contract between sovereign and subject, and the idea that sovereignty originally lay with the people themselves. See Pierre Jurieu, *Lettres pastorales addressées aux fidèles de France qui gémissent sous la captivité de Babylon* (1686-1689), esp. Lettre XVI, and Bossuet's reply *Cinquième avertissement aux Protestants* (1690).

[13] Alain Niderst, *op. cit.,* pp. 426-427. See also Catherine Plusquellec, 'L'œuvre de Catherine Bernard (Romans, Théâtre, Poésies)', thèse pour le doctorat de III^{e} cycle en Littérature et Civilisation Françaises, l'Université de Rouen-Houte-Normandie, 1984 (p. 111) and Jean-Marie Goulemot, *Discours, Révolutions et Histoire. Représentations de l'histoire et discours sur les révolutions de l'âge classique aux Lumières* (Paris: Union Générale d'Édition, 1975, p. 136).

[14] For Niderst also, such a reading is problematic. Furthermore, since the events comprising the Glorious Revolution took place in November and December 1688, we would need to assume that Bernard wrote the entire play, or modified it considerably, after that point, for an opening on 11 February 1689. Mary II and William III jointly acceded to the throne of England two days later on 13 February.

to the people is nonetheless very clearly a sign of the times; it points both to a certain familiarity in society with the elements of the debate and an awareness of the fact that in this *fin-de-siècle* climate absolutist values are increasingly questioned. The role Bernard attributes to the people gives her ample opportunity to voice both sides of the argument, and two models of government are evoked.

Both Sostrate and Gélon (for obvious self-interested reasons) are opposed to the role of the people, which they see as an encroachment and defiance of the queen's authority. According to Sostrate, who wants the throne for himself and so does not want Laodamie to give into these demands for Gélon:

> Vous voyez que le peuple attente sur vos droits,
> Madame, et qu'il est prêt à vous préscrire un choix:
> Hâtez-vous d'arrêter le cours de cette audace,
> Nommez, montrez un maître à cette populace,
> Madame, et les mutins saisis d'un juste effroi
> Reconnaîtront soudain et leur reine et leur roi. (ll. 1075-1080)

Similarly, Gélon who cares little for the demands of the State, and does not want the throne, wishing rather to prioritise his love for the queen's sister, elsewhere insists that the populace should be ignored:

> Oui, votre autorité, Madame, est trop blessée
> Par le choix que propose une foule insensée;
> Et vous devez payer par un juste refus
> Un insolent orgueil qui ne vous connaît plus.
> Les égards sont honteux dans une souveraine.
> Refusez vos sujets, puisque vous êtes Reine. (ll. 1235-1240)

Gélon's attitude towards 'une foule insensée' is the typically unfavourable one associated with traditional aristocratic values: elsewhere he comments, 'Le peuple que souvent son seul caprice guide / Pour de faibles vertus peut prendre un fol amour' (ll. 650-651).

The queen's own attitude appears to change as the play progresses. Initially she appears to voice the opposing side of the debate and to accept the contribution of the people as an integral part of the dynamic between sovereign and subject:

> Quand on a pour objet le bien de son empire,
> Aux suffrages du peuple on doit souvent souscrire. (ll. 641-642)

However when, in reality, an army delegation, mirroring the popular demand, attempts to persuade her to place Gélon on the throne (see ll. 1189-1194), she is insulted. As she remarks to Gélon:

> Du respect qui m'est dû pour vous on se dispense.
> Vous savez que l'armée a député vers moi,
> Et m'ose demander de vous nommer pour roi.
> Ce soin dans des sujets renferme trop d'audace.

Qui vient prier ainsi secrètement menace.
Un pas aussi hardi blesse l'autorité. (ll. 1208-1213)

This change in attitude could be due to the fact that initially she speaks in the abstract, while later she is faced with the humiliation of the army insisting on choosing someone who categorically rejects her and her throne, an insistance Gélon refers to as 'le crime du peuple' (l. 1215). It is not only her authority but her pride which is wounded. The change in tone is also linked to another feature however: a corollary of the increasing popular unrest which marks this disorderly universe is a heightened atmosphere of danger and threat, underlined by a growing sense of fear in the queen.

Increasingly, as the play progresses, the queen is obliged to pander to the desires of the people. As Phénix remarks:

Le peuple est effrayé: dans cette conjoncture
Il serait dangereux d'exciter son murmure,
Et par mille raisons vous lui devez donner
Un roi, dont la vertu soit propre à le gagner. (ll. 761-764)

It is tempting at times to question the veracity of Phénix' words, since it is in his interest to represent the people as a threatening mass, attributing to them what is primarily his own desire in order to intimidate the queen into compliance. However other characters also attest to the disorder among the populace. Phèdre, Nérée's confidante, remarks:

Tout le peuple s'émeut en demandant pour roi
Le glorieux héros qui vous garde sa foi. (ll. 871-872)

Interestingly, Sostrate, in his attempts to also influence the queen, maintains it would be dangerous *not* to resist the people (l. 1083). In either case, the queen's environment is one of peril. Despite her authority, it is the people who decide her actions, as fear becomes the primary motivating force. As she comments to Sostrate: 'il est trop dangereux / D'irriter contre moi des esprits orgueilleux' (ll. 1099-1100). She later remarks to Gélon, as she tells him that he must reign or leave the country:

A leur zèle pressant je n'ai rien refusé;
Dans l'état où je suis je ne l'ai pas osé. (ll. 1217-18)

Nérée's attitude, on the other hand, swings in the other direction. Initially the politically-astute princess is anxious to avoid the blame of the people, and is hence ready to give up Gélon:

Verrais-je contre moi tout un peuple en furie,
Me reprocher les maux de ma triste patrie? (ll. 957-958)

However, by the end of the play, she is critical of the people and tempted to confront them, even if it means putting her life at risk:

Mais pourquoi me cacher à ce peuple infidèle?

Allons aux yeux de tous détester son faux zèle.
S'il le faut, pour borner le cours de sa fureur,
Cessons, cessons de vivre, et vengeons une sœur. (ll. 1342-1345)

Interestingly, it is precisely when the *disorder* represented by the people is at its height and about to degenerate into chaos (the only times the word 'désordre' is used in the play (ll. 1330 & 1379)) that Bernard reminds us of the *order* which this female sovereign represents. As forecast by her confidante Argire ('[la reine] remettra les cœurs dans leur devoir (l. 1349)), when the queen finally appears before her subjects, they are immediately hushed in their demands, and remain silenced, fearful, respectful and submissive in the presence of their sovereign:

Aussitôt que la reine a paru dans la place,
Le respect naturel que lui doivent les cœurs
A dissipé l'orage et calmé les rumeurs.
Cette crainte qu'en nous le juste Ciel imprime,
Pour ceux qu'il fait régner par un droit légitime,
Impose le silence aux plus séditieux
Gélon a, de la voir, rendu grace aux Dieux.
Jusqu'alors arrêté par une injuste foule.
A l'aspect de la reine il voit qu'elle s'écoule; […]
La reine parle au peuple, et se fait écouter,
Quelques-uns à ses pieds vont enfin se jeter. (ll. 1356-1364, 1369-1370)

Any remote questioning of her authority appears thus to be quashed, and order appears to be re-established under the calming influence of the queen. It is particularly interesting that it is at the *sight* of the queen that order is restored: Bernard creates a character who is clearly aware of the mechanics of power as they underlined the cult of the royal body and the emphasis on spectacle in Louis XIV's France. By the same token, her choice of verb is noteworthy, as she goes to meet the crowd: 'Allons, et nous *montrons* à des sujets ingrats' (l. 1337) (my emphasis).[15]

However, the disorder of Bernard's universe is not so easily dissipated, and has yet to wreak its ultimate havoc. At just that moment, Sostrate, thwarted in his attempts to reach the throne, returns with his cronies. In a confrontation with Gélon, he himself is killed and chaos ensues. The queen falls at the hands of one of Sostrate's followers, Milon, and dies on the altar of Diana. She is immediately avenged by her supporters ('Nous poursuivons Milon, notre fureur l'accable / Nous avons déchiré ce monstre abominable' (ll. 1411-1412)), and particularly by Gélon:

On voit moins un combat qu'un carnage odieux.
Gélon aux ennemis paraît un de nos Dieux,
Mais un Dieu courroucé, juste vengeur du crime.

[15] According to Bossuet, 'Il y a un charme pour les peuples dans la vue du prince; et rien ne lui est plus aisé que de se faire aimer avec passion'. See *Politique tirée des propres paroles de l'Écriture sainte*, éd. Jacques Le Brun (Geneva: Droz, 1967), p. 89. The importance attached to royal entries demonstrates the centrality of this idea to sovereign-subject relations at the time.

Chaque coup de sa main immole une victime. (ll. 1413-1416)

Having contributed towards this violent retribution, Gélon leaves it for the people to finish:

Les criminels sont morts, et le parti qui fuit
Par le peuple irrité dans peu sera détruit. (ll. 1429-1430).

The play ends therefore in mob violence, with Nérée as queen (l. 1384), and Gélon by implication as king (l. 1433). In a most unsettling fashion, the legitimate orderly monarch is sacrificed to the demands of the disorderly people as Argire's fear, expressed earlier, comes to pass: 'L'ordre, vos droits sacrés, tout va se renverser' (l. 1314). Can this be read as a victory for the people who get their king, a king moreover who, while a good warrior, never appears overly interested in matters of State?[16] Is the female sovereign sacrificed to the demands of a patriarchal society that cannot accommodate her? The answer is possibly yes in both cases. In any case, Bernard has challenged the common association of gynæcocracy and disorder by this portrait of a political actor torn by the age-old public / private dichotomy in this dramatisation of the conflict between gynæcocracy and patriarchy. Such an innovative representation of the female sovereign is rare, albeit not unknown.[17] Bernard does raise questions, though, which go beyond issues of female sovereignty. Ultimately what dominates in the end is precisely the sense of disorder which has been growing throughout the play. Physically manifested in the mob violence of the *dénouement*, it supersedes that to reflect a dark and troubled universe where good does not necessarily win out, where justice does not necessarily triumph, and where the spectators do not depart 'l'esprit en repos'.

Les désordres de l'amitié

This displacement of disorder within the public sphere, from the locus of the female sovereign to the people, is reflected in a parallel displacement in the private and domestic sphere. Here the emphasis on love (habitual in drama) is shifted to, or at least shared with, a rare portrait (although perhaps not as rare as one might think) of what has historically been constructed as an even rarer phenomenon: female friendship. An analysis of this friendship in Bernard raises a number of issues. Firstly, it is important to bear in mind that the concept of friendship / *amitié*, and indeed the term itself, is certainly not ahistorical or universal, and varies according to historical period and culture.[18] Indeed, even within historical periods and within the writings of individual authors, the term can have different meanings. In the words of Nicolas Schapira,

> [Une enquête historienne sur l'amitié à l'âge moderne] bute sur l'infinie diversité des emplois de la notion, qui semble pouvoir s'appliquer à une grande variété de

[16] As he comments to Nérée, 'Hé ! que m'importe à moi de la paix, de la guerre, / De ce peuple indocile, et de toute la terre ? (ll. 965-966). Bernard explodes the traditional gendered association of men with public virtue and women with love by reversing it through the characters of Laodamie, Nérée and Gélon.

[17] Corneille and Du Ryer are the principal two dramatists who carve a space of self-determination for the *souveraine*.

[18] See the comments made by Alberta Contarello and Chiara Volpato, 'Images of friendship. Literary depictions through the ages', *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 8 (1991), 49-75 (pp. 69-70).

> relations sociales, et qui rend impossible toute tentative pour stabiliser la signification du lien amical. […] Le terme d'amitié est donc neutraliser par sa polyvalence même.[19]

The multi-faceted nature of the term, and its frequent usage in the seventeenth century to mean any type of affection, might imply that it is injudicious to translate it as the English word *friendship*, with its twentieth-first century meaning. However, since, as we will see, the relationship in question here demonstrates the intimacy and solicitude associated with friendship in modern theories of the relation, the use of the term *friendship* is justifiable.

Secondly, the issue might seem even more complicated in the case of Bernard by the fact that traditionally, from Cicero to Montaigne, women are excluded from theories of friendship on the basis that they are by 'nature' incapable of sustaining it. According to Montaigne: 'la suffisance ordinaire des femmes n'est pas pour respondre à cette conference et communication, nourisse de cette saincte couture; ny leur ame ne semble assez ferme pour soustenir l'estreinte d'un nœud si pressé et si durable'.[20] In the words of one of Lesage's characters, 'les femmes ne s'aiment point. […] Elles sont trop jalouses les unes des autres pour être capables d'amitié',[21] while La Rochefoucauld evokes the rarity of female friendship when he maintains, 'Ce qui fait que la plupart des femmes sont peu touchées de l'amitié, c'est qu'elle est fade quand on a senti de l'amour' (Maxime 440). The weight of this traditional discourse may explain somewhat the under-representation of female friendships in literature. While there is no doubt that friendships between women did exist in the *grand siècle* (salons and convents provide the most visible examples of female communities), it is possible that female friendship was for many writers of the time 'une pratique insignifiante', just as Christian Biet suggests female homosexuality may have been.[22] Finally, a further consideration in the case of *Laodamie* is that the friendship represented is between two blood sisters. Opinions are divided at the time concerning the extent to which familial relations can qualify as *amitié*. For Montaigne, for example, true friendship cannot exist between family members, an idea which would doubly exclude sisters, as both women and family.[23] Furetière, on the other hand, although not within the framework of a philosophical essay, does allow for family friendships.[24] Suffice to say that Bernard evidently aligns herself with the latter position, to the extent that she clearly defines the heroines' relationship in terms of *amitié*. Neither of the sisters frames their relationship in terms of blood-links. In other words, it is not the family tie *per se* that is

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[19] Nicolas Schapira, 'Les intermittences de l'amitié dans le *Dictionnaire universel* de Furetière, *Littératures classiques*, 47 (2003), 217-224.

[20] Michel de Montaigne, 'De l'amitié', *Essais*, Albert Thibaudet et Maurice Rat, éds, coll. Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), pp. 181-193 (p. 185)

[21] Alain-René Lesage, *Le Diable boiteux* [1726], ch. 16. Cited in Sylvie Requemora, 'L'amitié dans les *Maximes* de La Rochefoucauld', *XVII^e siècle*, 205 (1999), 687-728 (p. 712, n. 85). Similar ideas continue to be propagated today. According to Gilles Deleuze, 'One can never be friends with a woman. […] Friendship is the realization of the *external* possible offered to us by the male-Other. But woman has no external world to offer us.' Gilles Deleuze, 'Description of Woman: For a Philosophy of the Sexed Other', trans. by Keith W. Faulkner, *Angelaki: Journal of Theoretical Humanities*, 7.3 (2002) 17-24 (p. 19).

[22] Christian Biet, 'À quoi rêvent les jeunes filles? Homosexualité féminine, travestissement et comédie: le cas d'*Iphis et Iante* d'Isaac de Benserade (1643)', in Hodgson, éd., *op. cit.* pp. 53-81 (p. 57).

[23] Montaigne, *op. cit.,* pp. 183-184. His comments on family are framed in terms of fathers, sons and brothers.

[24] See Schapira, p. 219. The example he uses is found in the entry 'connoistre' in the *Dictionnaire universel.*

important; rather it is the sisters' *amitié* (mentioned fifteen times) which is at stake here.[25] This idea ties in with modern friendship theories which see blood sister relationships as a particular type of female friendship, in the words of one modern critic, 'distinguished by a complex tension between similarity and difference, closeness and separation, friendship and rivalry'.[26]

The importance Bernard attaches to friendship is highlighted by the fact that Laodamie's friendship with her sister is a crucial element in her conflict. The common conflict between love and duty, and the typical eternal triangle, are both displaced in this new configuration. Not only is Laodamie torn between her love of Gélon and duty to the State, but she is also torn between love of Gélon and friendship for her sister; in other words, a female-female (blood) relationship is perceived as equally important as a female-male one (initially, at any rate, before State concerns come into play for the queen). A further displacement is evident in the fact that, as the play progresses, her duty seems to favour her love (to the extent that both are calling Gélon to the throne). Love and duty therefore are both, not in opposition as is often the case in the drama of the period, but aligned rather against this new element, friendship. The affective disorder that reigns in Laodamie's heart is not only due to the rejection of her love, but to the fact that her friendship with her sister is suddenly threatened. The nature of this friendship therefore merits examination, given the importance accorded to it in this displacement of focus. A number of considerations are worthy of mention.

Firstly, it is clear that in Bernard's universe, *amitié* and *amour* are equally powerful *passions de l'âme*,[27] an idea underlined by the fact that the sisters use the verb 'aimer' to refer to their mutual attachment (ll. 477 and 595).[28] It is precisely because of the strength of both emotions that Laodamie's conflict is so dramatically intense, even before State concerns are brought to bear. It is in Act III.i that this conflict, and her psychological dilemma, are best articulated, as she oscillates through a range of emotions in a passage which merits lengthy quotation:

> Hélas, que ne laissais-je au moins agir son âme!
> Si je n'eusse formé moi-même son lien,
> Peut-être il m'eût aimée, ou n'aurait aimé rien.
> Pour m'obéir peut-être il aima la princesse.
> Qu'il me rende ce cœur dont je fus trop maîtresse.
> Mais quoi! veux-je en effet l'arracher à ma sœur,
> Une sœur qui sur moi fonde tout son bonheur?
> D'enlever son amant j'aurais la barbarie?
> Je sais ce qu'il inspire, elle en perdra la vie;
> Elle m'aime, et mon cœur soupirant en secret
> De sa tendre amitié cent fois a vu l'effet:

[25] There is only one other mention of *amitié* in the play, in l. 156. This sixteenth reference is not relevant to the sisters.
[26] Diana Wallace, *Sisters and Rivals in British Women's Fiction, 1914-39* (London: Macmillan, 2000), p. 7.
[27] See line 807 where love is described as 'une autre passion' implying that *amitié* is also one. For a similar viewpoint in an earlier dramatist's work, see Guy Snaith 'All for friendship: La Calprenède's Phalante and other friends', *Seventeenth-Century French Studies*, 19 (1994), 147-155, esp. p. 150.
[28] This is in keeping with Furetière for whom 'le mot d'aimer s'applique également à l'amitié et à l'amour'. See his dictionary entry 'aimer'.

Mes douleurs mille fois ont pénétré son âme,
Pour l'en récompenser je vais trahir sa flamme.
Hélas! je me reproche en vain ma trahison,
J'ai goûté de l'espoir le dangereux poison.
Quand je vois pour mes feux que tout se rend facile,
Je sens que je me fais un reproche inutile,
Que je vais étouffer l'honneur et la pitié;
Que l'amour dans mon cœur surmonte l'amitié.
Mais non, Argire, non, faisons-lui résistance,
Ramène ma raison en m'ôtant l'espérance. (ll. 586-606)

The tone moves from one of regret to one of horror and self-chastisement that she would even contemplate the *barbarie* of wresting (*arracher*) her beloved Gélon from her sister (ll. 591-598). She then bemoans the uselessness of her self-reproach (ll. 599-604), before immediately rallying her moral courage and opting to prioritise her (sororal) friendship at the close of the speech (ll. 605-606). It is not surprising, in those last four lines, that *honneur, pitié* and *raison* are all by implication opposed to *amour*; such an opposition is common. What is interesting, however, is the new element in their alignment with (sororal) friendship. Phèdre, Nérée's confidente, has earlier anticipated the prioritisation of *amitié* from Laodamie, which indicates to us both how the importance of friendship is noted by others, and how the queen's *générosité* is seen to be associated with her *amitié*. In the words of Phèdre:

La reine est généreuse, et vous aime, Madame;
Et quand elle verra le trouble de votre âme,
Eût-elle de l'amour, la gloire et la pitié
La forceront encore à suivre l'amitié. (ll. 477-480).

Of course, no conflict is so easily resolved, and despite Laodamie's resolution in Act III.i, she implicitly offers the throne to Gélon in the following scene.

Amour and *amitié* are often framed, as above, as being in antithesis, or as conflictual for Laodamie. However, another image is presented by Nérée who, blissfully unaware that she and her sister share the same love object, has seen her *amour* and *amitié* grow in parallel.

[L'amour] serra ces doux nœuds commencés par vos soins.
Mais, Madame, mon cœur ne vous en doit pas moins;
Et ma tendre amitié pour vous se fortifie,
Plus cet amour répand de charmes sur ma vie. (ll. 71-74)

Here, *amour* and *amitié* are not in competition but develop simultaneously.[29] Of course, gratitude is also an integral part of Nérée's affection for her sister: Nérée owes her betrothal and happiness to Laodamie and so is indebted to her. This leads to an emotional

[29] Nérée elsewhere implies that passionate love of another individual will unite them since they will be sharing a similar experience (ll. 362-364).

inequality which is mirrored by the inequality in their social and political positions.[30] (Nérée at one point sees herself as a far less attractive marriage proposition than her sovereign sister, and exclaims: 'Quelle inégalité, Ciel injuste!' (l. 491)). Reciprocity of emotion does not, obviously, entail abolition of social and political hierarchies, even between sisters. Laodamie's sovereign power as queen is ultimately a power also over her sister: as Nérée states, 'Madame, de mon sort vous êtes la maîtresse' (l. 842).[31] Indeed, if necessary Laodamie's personal guard can implement this power. When Nérée sets off for the temple of Diana, (we are told 'Elle veut y fixer son destin' (l. 1286)), her efforts at self-determination are thwarted by her sister. Laodamie saves her from herself and has the royal guards forcibly bring back her 'heureuse rivale' (l. 1296). On the other hand, while Nérée has none of the political power of the queen, she can, and does, act in her sister's favour, by also prioritising State concerns and releasing Gélon from any commitment.

Despite the reciprocity of the sisters' affection for each other, a number of differences emerge, therefore, in the way they experience their friendship, all of which can be traced back to the queen's political position. In the opening scene, while Nérée tries to boost her sister's morale, the queen twice highlights the distance between them: for her, Nérée can never understand her chagrin, at this stage linked to her forced political marriage and unrequited love. Later, while Nérée evokes the intimacy and confidences they usually share, clearly intending it to continue (ll. 333-35, l. 343), it is obvious that Laodamie's secret precludes such intimacy. In I.i, the queen withdraws from Nérée's presence; at the end of II.ii she ends their conversation even before she sees Sostrate, and in III.vii she tries to avoid her. It is clear that Bernard does not idealise the sisters' relationship but paints it in all its complexity, inequalities and tensions included. What she also does not avoid is the subject of jealousy, an inevitable element of their relationship given the fact that both are in love with the same man. For Laodamie, despite the fact that she has orchestrated the relationship between her lover and sister, she cannot but feel jealous (I.ii). Following Sostrate's revelation to Nérée in II.iii that he suspects Laodamie also loves Gélon, Nérée too is tormented both by jealousy (II.v), and by a sense of betrayal, and the portrait she forecasts of her sister is not pretty (II.vi):

> La reine vengera le mépris de ses feux;
> Une amante outragée, une amante qui règne.
> Voilà tous les malheurs qu'il faut donc que je craigne.[32] (ll. 496-498)

From this displaced eternal triangle, where two women are in love with the one man,[33] emerges a complex portrait of sisterhood where the sisters are both friends *and* rivals, demonstrating how the two are not mutually exclusive but often inextricably linked in sister relationships.

This becomes clear in the third and final exchange of any length that they have, which takes place in the final scene of Act III. Here Nérée highlights their intimacy by

[30] On exchange and the granting of mutual favours and services in friendship, see Schapira, p. 219-211.
[31] Later she comments, 'Ma vie est en vos mains, et je viens m'y remettre' (l. 1336).
[32] See also ll. 921ff and 931ff where the jealousy Nérée felt is evoked, although explicit reference is not made to Laodamie.
[33] The more typical 'eternal triangle' plot, first schematised by René Girard in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* (1961), concerns two men in love with one woman.

intimating that it is to her sister she turns in times of woe, even though the same sister has caused the woe:

> Encor que vous causiez ma mortelle douleur
> Je suis accoutumée à vous ouvrir mon cœur,
> Il veut vous faire part de ses peines secrètes;
> Je me plains même à vous des maux que vous me faites. (ll. 783-786)

Similarly, Laodamie — when she eventually admits her secret love, moved by the sight of her sister on her knees before her ('Que faites-vous? hélas! Princesse, levez-vous' (l. 820)) — highlights how it is precisely because of their friendship that she has revealed her secret:

> Je vous aurais peut-être épargné de l'ennui,
> En vous désavouant ce que je sens pour lui.
> Mon amitié n'a pu se résoudre à se taire,
> Et vous avez voulu que je fusse sincère. (ll. 851-853)

Ultimately, any jealousy is subsumed into a greater altruism (a quality often seen as central to friendship), particularly on the part of Nérée. From the outset of the play, it is the princess — less implicated in State concerns than the queen, although demonstrating greater political virtue than Gélon — who best reveals a tremendous capacity for a deep and selfless affection. Following the death of Attale, she rejoices on her sister's behalf:

> Mon bonheur est parfait, il n'y manque plus rien.
> Les chagrins de ma sœur y mettaient un obstacle,
> Mais pour l'en délivrer le Ciel fait un miracle;
> Quoiqu'au destin d'Attale on doive de pitié,
> La mienne dans mon cœur cède à mon amitié.
> Que la reine a souffert! qu'elle a versé de larmes!
> Ses pleurs de mon amour troublaient les plus doux charmes.
> J'ai souhaité cent fois dans le fond de mon cœur
> Souffrir plutôt ses maux, et qu'elle eût mon bonheur. (ll. 304-312)[34]

This selflessness reaches its apogee when it becomes clear that she would be happy to die for her sister in Act V (l. 1346). Furthermore, her grief and shock at her sister's unexpected murder is self-evident, and leads her to express a desire for her own death.[35]

Laodamie, on the other hand, as the play unfolds, is prevented by her political position from acting in as selfless a manner as her sister, even if she wanted to, a fact that contributes to the complexity of her situation.[36] As queen, driven increasingly by *raison*

[34] Elsewhere, she is anxious that her sister enjoy love as she does: 'Aimez: l'Amour vous doit tout ce qu'il a de charmes, / Pour vous récompenser d'avoir versé des larmes' (ll. 365-66).

[35] See l. 1385, ll. 1419-22, Gélon's comments in ll. 1425-26 and the suggestion in l. 1433 that she might die of grief.

[36] The complexity of her character is also highlighted by the fact that her *gloire* will always be tinged by the ambiguity of her motivation: one could argue that Laodamie is driven primarily by love in offering the throne to Gélon, and merely using *raison d'État* as a pretext. Such an interpretation does not take adequate account,

d'Etat, she is duty-bound to favour the State, and hence led to contemplate betraying her sister, in a prioritisation of *devoir* over *amitié* which La Rochefoucauld advocates.[37] Where friendship could overcome love (see l. 605 cited above), duty to the State changes the equation. By III.8 it is clear that friendship is secondary to her political virtue:

> Je vous l'ai dit, ce n'est point mon amour,
> Ma sœur, qui réglera nos destins en ce jour.
> L'état est menacé, déjà la Péonie
> Aux fiers Etoliens contre nous s'est unie.
> A cette guerre encor Rome va prendre part.
> Pour mon peuple effrayé serai-je sans égard?
> Il demande pour roi le prince qui vous aime,
> Dites, que puis-je faire en cette peine extrême? (ll. 843-850)

Interestingly, this scene sees the last mention of *amitié* in the play (l. 853) and it is no coincidence that friendship is sidelined, as political concerns take over. It surfaces again, as we saw above, in the latter half of Act V when Laodamie recalls her sister from the temple of Diana, just as Nérée indicates her willingness to die for the queen. Laodamie's final comment concerning her sister sums up her own attitude; despite her anger and disappointment concerning Gélon, she exclaims:

> Cependant loin de suivre un trop juste courroux
> Je reconnais ma sœur dans mes transports jaloux. (ll. 1305-6)

Although her anger against Gélon may be justified, and although she is clearly jealous of her sister, she still recognises her precisely *as* a sister, and the bond that that entails. Recognition and affection lie at the heart of the sisters' *amitié.*

So, how innovative is this representation of friendship? The question raises three issues. Firstly, it could be argued that *any* representation of friendship between women is innovative, given the rarity of its appearance — a rarity no doubt due in part to the weight of the discourse which constructed women as incapable of it (as mentioned above). This presupposition, as Perry Gethner indicates in his edition of this play, is challenged in the portrayal of the sisters' close friendship, and the play therefore contributes towards what Gethner calls 'une réestimation de la nature féminine', and what I prefer to call a re-evaluation of gender constructions.[38] However it is important to bear in mind that this 'rarity' of representations of female friendship is possibly in part explicable by the fact that friendship as a theme in general could be described up until recently (to adapt Christian Biet's phrase cited above) as 'un sujet insignifiant' for modern researchers. In 1992, sociologist Pat O'Connor wrote, 'The study of friendship can, even today, be viewed as a rather trivial exercise'. Maurice Aymard also comments on a absence of research into

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it seems to me, of the atmosphere of fear and danger outlined above. For an opposing interpretation to mine of Laodamie, see Piva, for whom the character is false and insincere. (Piva, ed., *Œuvres*, II, pp. 46-51).

[37] For the debate concerning what Requemora calls, 'l'amitié face au secret d'État et au sort de la nation', see Requemora, pp. 720-721.

[38] Gethner, ed., p. 187.

friendship from historians and anthropologists.[39] The situation has changed somewhat since those comments were made, and the renewed interest philosophers and historians have in the area is evident in the recent publication of a number of anthologies and essay-collections.[40] In terms of seventeenth-century France, signs of growing interest in the area are underlined by the publication of a themed issue of *XVII^e siècle* in 1999 and of Ullrich Langer's study *Perfect Friendship* in 1993.[41] However, despite this work and a number of other forays into investigation of the theme in the seventeenth century, it remains relatively unexplored territory for the period.[42] In addition, while friendship as an area may have been neglected overall, it is clearly women's friendships which have been most overlooked. In the words of Janice Raymond,

> Women have been friends for millennia. Women have been each other's best friends, relatives, stable companions, emotional and economic supporters, and faithful lovers. But this tradition of female friendship, like much else in women's lives, has been distorted, dismantled, destroyed – in summary, to use Mary Daly's term *dismembered*.[43]

As a theme in English and American fiction (chiefly by women), and as an important element of the lives of the same women writers, it has provoked considerable interest since

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[39] Pat O'Connor, *Friendships Between Women. A Critical View* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), p. 1; Maurice Aymard 'Amitié et convivialité' in *Histoire de la vie privée. De la Renaissance aux Lumières*, vol. III, sous la dir. de Philippe Ariès et Georges Duby (Paris: Seuil, 1986), pp. 455-499 (p. 457).

[40] For essay collections, see Christophe Merle et Bernard N. Schumacher, éds, *L'amitié* (Paris: PUF, 2005); Georges Ravis-Giordani, éd., *Amitiés. Anthropologie et histoire* (Aix-en-Provence: Publications de l'Université de Provence, 1999) and Neera K. Badhwar, *Friendship. A Philosophical Reader* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993). For anthologies of writings concerning friendship through the ages, see Dimitri El Murr, éd., *L'amitié,* coll. Corpus (Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 1999) and Michèle Sarde et Arnaud Blin, *Le Livre de l'amitié*: *parce que c'était lui*… (Paris: Seghers, 1997).

[41] *XVII^e siècle*, 205.4 (1999). (None of the articles discusses friendship between women). Ullrich Langer, *Perfect Friendship. Studies in Literature and Moral Philosophy from Boccaccio to Corneille* (Geneva: Droz, 1993). See also Anne-Vincent Buffault, *L'Exercice de l'amitié. Pour une histoire des pratiques amicales aux XVIII^e et XIX^e siècles* (Paris: Seuil, 1995).

[42] In addition to the articles referred to in the notes above, see also Philippe-Joseph Salazar, 'Philia: Connaissance et amitié', in François Lagarde, éd., *L'Esprit en France au XVII^e siècle*, coll. Biblio 17, 101 (Paris-Seattle-Tübingen: PFSCL, 1997), pp. 11-27; Jean-Pierre Dens, 'Amour et amitié chez La Rochefoucauld' in Milorad Margitic and Byron R. Wells, éds, *L'Image du souverain dans le théâtre de 1600 à 1650. Maximes. Madame de Villedieu*, coll. Biblio 17, 37 (Paris-Seattle-Tübingen: PFSCL, 1987), pp. 215-222; Richard Hodgson, 'La Rochefoucauld et Saint-Evremond: Des 'détours' de l'amour-propre au 'trafic' de l'amitié', in Suzanne Guellouz, éd., *Saint-Evremond au miroir du temps*, coll. Biblio 17, 157 (Tübingen: GNV, 2005) pp. 169-84). Two articles which examine friendship as a literary theme are Perry Gethner, 'Love and friendship: from Tirso to Desjardins', *PFSCL*, 32.62 (2005), 113-123, and Eric Méchoulan, 'Amitié et générosité dans *L'Astrée* d'Honoré d'Urfé et *Francion* de Charles Sorel', *Tangence*, 66 (2001), 22-35. Contarello and Volpato (*op. cit*.) analyse the theme in five French women-authored novels from the twelfth century to the twentieth century, including Lafayette's *La Princesse de Clèves*. Guy Snaith's article (*op. cit*.) analyses the centrality of the theme in La Calprenède, and identifies Mairet's *Silvanire*, Corneille's *Horace*, Chevreau's *Deux amis*, Boisrobert's *Rivaux amis*, and Du Ryer's *Clarigène* as plays which treat of friendship.

[43] Janice G. Raymond, *A Passion for Friends. Toward a Philosophy of Female Affection* (London: The Women's Press, 1986), p. 4. See also Élaine Audet, *Le Cœur pensant. Courtepointe de l'amitié entre femmes* (Québec, Le Loup de Gouttière, 2000).

the 1970s,[44] but nothing of a comparative volume exists for seventeenth-century France.[45] While allowing for the fact that female friendship is undoubtedly under-portrayed as a literary theme,[46] then, I would argue that absence of research into the area also colours our ideas concerning its 'rarity'. Further research may reveal that Bernard's inclusion of female friendship as a central theme is not as rare as we might think, although very possibly finding its expression primarily in the work of women writers.[47]

Allowing for this question of 'rarity' in general, a second key issue hinges on the extent to which this particular representation of female friendship is innovative. Much of the existing research, such as it is, focuses on the homosexual, political, material, *mondain*, or maternal aspects to female friendship. The representation in *Laodamie* does not fit into any of these categories, and it may be that it is the type of friendship – as tender, disinterested affection – which is novel in Bernard.

Finally, a more striking and clear-cut innovation stems from the fact that this literary representation of *amitié* is between blood sisters. Three other plays of the period represent blood sisters as their central characters: Thomas Corneille's *Ariane* (1672), Gaspard Abeille's *Argélie, reine de Thessalie* (1674), and Louis Ferrier's *Anne de Bretagne, reine de France* (1678). In the Corneille and Ferrier plays the sisters share the same love object; in Abeille, the object of Argélie's desires is in love with her sister. However all three differ from *Laodamie*, since the emphasis is on the sisters as rivals rather than friends. It is in this early modern representation of a thematic which today remains neglected[48] that Bernard's innovation is most evident.

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[44] See, for example, the work of Nina Auerbach, Janet Todd, Pauline Nestor and Tess Cosslett. Todd's volume *Women's friendship in literature* (1980) also examines French literature of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. On lesbian relationships in literature, see Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the love of men: romantic friendship and love between women from the Renaissance to the present* (London: Women's Press, 1985).

[45] To the best of my knowledge, the one full-length study devoted to the area is Mariane Legault's Ph.D. dissertation, 'Narrations déviantes. Représentations littéraires de l'amitié féminine au XVIIe siècle en France', University of British Columbia, 2004. See also her article 'Amitiés féminines dans *Plus Belle que Fée* de La Force: un modèle sapphique' in Hodgson, éd., *op. cit.,* pp. 269-279. Other articles include Ruth Capasso, 'The solitary woman and friendship in Madame de Lafayette's *Zaïde*', in Ginette Adamson and Eunice Myers, eds, *Continental, Latin-American and Francophone Women Writers*, Vol. I (Lanham, MD, University Press of America), 1987, pp. 39-43; Leonard Hinds, 'Female friendship as the foundation of love in Madeleine de Scudéry's 'Histoire de Sapho', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 41.3-4 (2001), 23-35; Charles G. S. Williams, 'Friendship's Duties: Mme de Motteville and the 'femme forte', *Cahiers du dix-septième,* 4.1 (1990), 41-50; Catherine R. Montfort, 'Love and amitié: Madame de Sévigné's letters', *Women in French Studies*, 7 (1999), 25-45. Part of Gethner's 'Love and friendship' discusses female friendships in Villedieu's *Le Favori*. A number of articles have been written concerning Gournay's friendship with Montaigne. For her own ideas on friendship, see Patricia Cholakian, 'The economics of friendship: Gournay's *Apologie pour celle qui escrit*', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 23.5 (1995), 407-417. For a very useful analysis of friendships between nuns, see chapter 5 in Carol Baxter, 'God's warriors: Port-Royal – the construction of a powerful sisterhood (1609-1709)', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Trinity College Dublin, 2005. For a biographical approach, see Denise Mayer, *Une Amitié parisienne au grand siècle: Madame de Lafayette et Madame de Sévigné*, *1648-1693*, coll. Biblio 17, 57 (Paris-Seattle-Tübingen: PFSCL, 1990).

[46] See, for example, Contarello and Volpato (p. 72) who argue that despite evidence in society of female friendships, they are 'underportrayed' in the novels they examined, compared to friendships between men.

[47] Two obvious examples which merit detailed examination in this regard are Villedieu's *Les Mémoires de la vie d'Henriette-Sylvie de Molière*, and Bernard's own *Eléonor d'Yvrée*. Gethner also points to Anne-Marie Du Boccage's play *Les Amazones* (1749) as another text which explores the theme.

[48] According to Diana Wallace, emphasis on feminist ideas of sisterhood among communities of women have led to a paucity of analyses of the blood sister relationship. Wallace, *op. cit*., pp. 7 and 60. Among the few

In an often-quoted passage in *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf commented on the absence of female friendship in literature:

> 'Chloe liked Olivia', I read. And then it struck me how immense a change was there. Chloe liked Olivia perhaps for the first time in literature. […] And I tried to remember any case in the course of my reading where two women are represented as friends.

However, as Annis Pratt (among others) has pointed out, 'Chloe had been liking Olivia for several centuries before Virginia Woolf noticed it'.[49] Pratt's own analysis concerns fiction by women in English in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It would seem that seventeenth-century French women writers also give the lie to Woolf's comment. To what extent, remains to be seen.

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studies that do treat of it are Amy K Levin, *The Suppressed Sister* (1992) and Masako Hirai, *Sisters in Literature: Female Sexuality* in Antigone*,* Middlemarch, Howard's End *and* Women in Love (1998). While a cursory reading of the three plays from the 1670s indicates that none of them portrays the sisters' relationship in as complex a fashion as does Bernard, nonetheless a detailed analysis of them might serve to throw further light on an early modern imaginary of sisters. Undoubtedly the two most well-known sister characters of the time are Phèdre and Ariadne. On these siblings, see Richard E. Goodkin, 'Thomas Corneille's Ariane, and Racine's Phèdre. The older sister strikes back', *Esprit créateur*, 38.2 (1998), 60-71, and Allen G. Wood, 'Phèdre, Ariane et le fil de la généalogie féminine', in *La Rochefoucauld*, Mithridate, *Frères et sœurs, Les Muses sœurs*, éd. Claire Carlin, coll. Biblio 17, 111 (Tübingen: Narr, 1998), pp. 231-239. One other article in this latter volume relates to sisters but it is to two women who do not share a blood relationship, Sabine and Camille in Corneille's *Horace*.

[49] Annis Pratt, *Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction* (Brighton: Harvester, 1982), p. 95.