Meaningful paradoxes: Rhetorical Strategies in Early Modern Female Life-Writing.

Workshop presentation

This workshop challenges traditional considerations of female life writing as anomalies within their national literary histories by advancing an interdisciplinary and cross-national approach to life-writing and autobiographical narrative in the pan-European context of the *querelle des femmes*. The authors selected construct rhetorical spaces where self-representation is both a cause and a consequence of their experience of marginalization. Their autobiographical texts create meaning through apparent contradictions in a way that forces a reappraisal of female life writing. We situate such reconsideration against the grain of the *querelle des femmes*, since it necessarily shapes female authorship in early modern Europe. The aim is to shed new light both on the authors presented and of the *querelle* canon more generally. We will examine excerpts from the writings of the following authors:

María de San José (Salazar) (1548-1603), whose “autobiographical” allegory on behalf of all Spanish Discalced Counter-Reformation nuns, *Book for the Hour of Recreation*, provided an account of Carmelite history which employed biblical “imperatives” for female participation in aspects of battling Protestant heresies.

French royal midwife Louise Bourgeois (1563-1636) was the first woman to publish a midwifery manual in the heretofore exclusively male domain of medical print culture. *Diverse Observations on Sterility, Miscarriage, Fertility, Childbirth, and the Diseases of Women and Newborn Children* was published in 1609. Two volumes followed in 1617 and 1626 respectively.

Queen Kristina (1626-1689), was the second female monarch of Sweden. After abdicating from the Swedish throne and converting to Catholicism she started work on one of the earliest known Swedish autobiographical works, *La vie de la Reine Christine, fait par elle-même dediée au Dieu*. The work was never finished, but was written for publication.

Each of these writers represent different regional and temporal spaces, different places in the *querelle* canon, and different literary contexts: religious, medical and political. We hope that reading them together will open up new approaches both with regards to the *querelle* and to the constantly changing genre of female life-writing and autobiographical narratives. Participants of the workshop are expected to read the primary sources before attending the workshop, and are encouraged to read the secondary sources listed below. We will open our discussion with the following questions in mind but welcome initiatives from the participants.

1. How does the use of paradox open rhetorical spaces for negotiations of marginality and empowerment? In what ways do the conventions of life-writing and autobiographical narrative lend themselves to such strategy? What can we learn from the similarities and differences in the strategies our chosen authors employ?
2. How did the rhetoric of marginality both enable the authors to engage with the received messages about the inferiority, ineptitude, unnaturalness of female and other marginalized persons, and encourage them to create meaningful counter narratives?
3. Does the text employ a legal or theological rhetoric? If it does, how does it shape the female subject by means of language, procedure, questions and answers?
4. What arguments did these authors use to justify their entrance into the public, printed or scribal sphere? How can these arguments be related to how the authors have been described in the literary canon, and how their works have been received?
5. What can we gain from reading these text in against the grain of the *querelle des femmes*? Does such a reading shed new light on the texts, especially in relation to questions of marginality and paradox? How can the texts in turn challenge conceptions we may have of the *querelle*?

Questions that relate to the specific authors include:

**María de San José**

*Recreaciones* is, as Alison Weber puts it, “a parody of the ‘command autobiography.’” In the selected pages, author María de San José Salazar uses two main narrative references to instruct her fellow sisters: the Bible and aspects of Teresa of Avila’s history. Do these “rhetorical” choices create any tension with the supposed mandate? If one “paradox” here is what is expected out of María’s genre versus what she delivers, is there anything else — strategies, contradictions to expectations, etc.—that she knowingly uses? If so what end? How might her dialogue have been received by listening sisters?

**Louise Bourgeois**

As a woman and midwife, Bourgeois, author of a medical text was doubly marginalized. What kinds of rhetorical strategies does she use to overcome her marginal status in the world of publishing, medicine, and society at-large? How aware does she seem to be of the barriers that she faces and how successful do you think she is in persuading her audience that she had medical authority? Does she come across as arrogant or humble or both? Why? What is paradoxical about her marginality?

**Kristina**

As both a woman and a monarch, Kristina’s autobiography is written from a paradoxical position. Taking that as a point of departure, how can we understand the paradoxical way that Kristina positions herself as both male and female? What type of character is she trying to create, and what kind of rhetorical strategies does she employ to do this? How can the text be related to Kristina’s political ambitions to claim a throne for herself after having abdicated? In this context, what can we make of the legend of her birth, as it is retold by herself in her autobiography?
All participants are expected to read the following primary sources:

**Excerpts from María de San José (Salazar), Book for the Hour of Recreation.**

**Excerpts from Louise Bourgeois, Diverse Observations Concerning Sterility, Miscarriages, Fertility, Birthing, and Diseases of Women and Newborn Children**

**Excerpts from Kristina, Självbiografi och aforismer.**
Natur och Kultur. Edited by Marianne Rappe and annotated by Magnus von Platen. Translated by Matilda Amundsen Bergström

Suggested readings of secondary sources are as follows:

Alexander, Gavin, "Prosopopoeia: the speaking figure", *Renaissance Figures of Speech.*


Diefendorf, Barbara, "Rethinking the Catholic Reformation: The Role of Women."

Pomata, Gianna, "Was there a Querelle des femmes in early modern medicine?”, *Arenal. Revista de Historia de las Mujeres.* 20:3 (2013), 213-41

Tegenborg Falkdalen, Karin, *The King is a Woman: The Female Monarch in Rhetoric and Practice during the Early Modern Era.* Diss Umeå University, 2003. 170-174


Cambridge: Harvard U P, 1995. This title is not included in the provided pdf.

away when the monks and nuns sought their consolation here on earth. They
got to eat their bread and were not happy with the fruit of the vine and
trampling of the grapes, as true charity cooled, Lebanon was left confounded
and dark, losing the whiteness of charity.aron was left a desert, empty of
the praises of God, because this signified how Carmel and Carmel were laid
waste by insatiable ambition, losing their sweet sleep, quiet, and repose. And
later it says in jeremias, 'I looked upon the mountains and beheld, they [that]
trembled [were the largest], and all the hills were troubled. I beheld, and to
there was no man: and all the birds of the air were gone. Now this passage
will be understood to refer to the contemplatives, and therefore Carmel
was left deserted and mourning for the beautiful places of the shepherds and
the green fields. With no one to be nourished by grazing there, the summit of
Carmel withered.

'Look ahead now, Gracia, and tell what you have twice been about to
start when Justa stopped you.'

'She must have been afraid,' replied Gracia, 'that I might say something
about the past, or mention the Devil, which seems to frighten her as it does
Sister Basiana, who crosses herself a thousand times during the reading in
rectory whenever his name is mentioned.'

'I'm not so timid as to be scared by that,' said Justa, 'but I am afraid,
when you make ready to loose your reason upon us, that you may say some-
thing foolish.'

'Is that what you're afraid of?' said Gracia. 'By now you should have lost
your fear and taken up arms against the many foolish things you've already
heard, for most likely you have them all counted up for us.'

'No, by now I've lost count,' said Justa.

'This is no time to set us laughing,' said Gracia, 'for it is time for nothing
but tears when we consider such a fall, though the heart takes courage once
more on reaching the point where, with yet another prophecy from Isaias,
our Carmel is to rise again. So that you may see clearly, Sister, that it is not by
chance but rather entirely by God's design that this loss was restored by
women, hear what Isaias says in chapter thirty-two, Rise up, ye rich women,
and hear my voice, ye confident daughters, give ear to my speech. [ . . . ] for
the vintage is at an end, the gathering shall come no more [and all shall be de-
stroyed], . . . Then the fruitful field shall become as a desert, and judgment
shall dwell in the wilderness, and justice shall sit in the fruitful field of
Carmel. And the work of justice shall be peace, and the service of justice
quietness.' 

105. Isaias (Isaias) 32:9-10, 15-17, adapted to account for disparities between Maria's and
other biblical translations.
“Wait,” said Justa, “go no further, what you just said about ‘the service of justice’ is right there in Isaiah.”

“Yes, Sister,” answered Gracia, “would I make things up out of my head?”

“A wondrous thing,” said Justa. “Do you not see the very words of our own Rule, 117 by which Isaiah seems to wish to inspire those whom he is calling?”

“Said so,” said Gracia, “wait, and you will see how he leads them, to bring them to that justice and peace, because further on he says, and [for your] security for ever . . . my people shall sit in the beauty of peace, and in the tabernacles of confidence—118—which is another point in our Rule—when he has first told them to gird their loins and mourn for the breasts, for the destruction of that fruitful vineyard, 119 so that we were not wrong in calling it ‘a fat mountain,’ for there have been shepherds, pastures, and sheep that were sacrificed there, as were the glorious Saint Anastatus and many others along with him, in countless numbers both before and after, ravaged by those ravening wolves, the Devil’s disciples. As the direct opponent of anything belonging to the Most Blessed Virgin, the Devil tries to darken and tear down the stars of our sky with his serpent’s tail, tearing down the true spirit of poverty with possession, and humility with pride, resisting God and His Prelates with self-will, and abstinence with immoderation, and tearing down charity with ambition.

“When these foundations were pulled from under the building, it began to go to ruin and would have fallen to the ground, had not she who was its protector and shelter extended her hand and taken to the roads to appease the true David, who came in anger against Nabai. 120 Like another Abigail, she offered him two hundred loaves, which is the number of priests who were engaged in this reform when His Holiness Pope Gregory XIII granted us the papal bull, and they can quite properly be offered up in place of the bread and wine offered up by Abigail, for they are priests after the Order of Melchisedek. 121 But this divine Abigail brought slain and dressed the five kids that had destroyed Carmel, which are the five vices we have named, and a hundred clusters of raisins, which are the sins joined together in charity who have undergone mortification. And at this our sovereign David, clearly appeased, sent blessings and thanks by way of his vicar-general here on earth.

“And with that,” said Gracia, “you go on, Sister Atanasia, for I have come thus far.”

“It would be a pity, Sister,” said Atanasia, “for you to cut this thread for a woman who will be so poor at tying it up.”

“It seems to me it’s already cut,” said Justa, “for by what Gracia has said, that great Carmel of the past has already come to an end; this one will have to be built from another start.”

“You are deceived,” said Gracia, “for that one has not now come to an end nor is this one now beginning, but rather, it is the same now as it was.”

“How can it possibly be the same?” said Justa. “For those regions where the hermit saints once dwelled have come to an end, and they are no longer ours, and it is impossible to say that those mountains moved to this place.”

“Impossible, Sister?” replied Gracia. “That would be true for those who have no faith, but for those of us who do it is not necessarily so. Don’t you know what the Lord says in the Gospel? If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, Remove from hence hither, and it shall remove? 122 Well then, where is such lively faith to be found as in our Spain? It moved the great Carmelite Order here, here the Order sent forth new shoots where it is now established in the midst of that faith, which is its basis. Our Carmel is set in the northern reaches, in the midst of this fortunate and cherished province of Spain, with the greater part of it transplanted at present between the west and the north, extending toward the south through the east.

“And so that you may understand that it is one and the same Carmel, I shall go back to say, with the passage from David, that it is a fat mountain because it is full of wealth and pastures and everything that can be found on mountainsides. God did not leave this dwelling empty, as it is a mountain in which God is well pleased to dwell; for there the Lord shall dwell unto the end. 123 And it is not surprising that it should be rich and full of good things, because Micah says in his seventh chapter, Feed thy people with thy rod, the flock of thy inheritance, them that dwell alone in the forest, in the midst

117. The very words of our own Rule: Carmelite Rule, Silent.
119. To gird their loins . . . fruitful vineyard. Paraphrase of Isaiah 32:11-12.
120. 1 Kings 25:23-35 (and 25:18 is cited in the next sentence). Nabai is described (in Douay) as a wealthy man whose “possessions were in Carmel . . . and the name of his wife was Abigail. And she was a prudent and very comely woman, but her husband was churlish” (1 Kings 25:2, 5).
121. Priests after the Order of Melchisedek. Matta is making a complex typological allusion here, weaving together two biblical texts: Psalms 109:4 (108:4), “Though a priest for ever according to the order of Melchisedek”; and Genesis 14:18, “Melchisedek, the king of Salem, [brought] forth bread and wine, for he was the priest of the most high God.”
122. Matthew 17:19.
123. Psalms 67:16-17.
of Carmel.124 Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord; we might add here, 'the people whom He hath chosen for His inheritance.'125

"And because I am tired, and our Sister Atanasia is no longer here, although we still see her body before us, let us allow her to retreat to her little cave, for I don't think she will give us much of an explanation of what we have said."

"Don't leave off your conversation for my sake," said Atanasia, "for you do not disturb me just because I am engaged in certain devotions, conversations like this are like music to the ears, to enliven the spirit."

"Be that as it may," said Gracia, "it would be well for us to retire, for it is time."

SIXTH RECREATION

In which they discuss the riches and precious stones of Mount Carmel

The next day, when Justa and Gracia had come to Atanasia's hermitage, they found her prostrate upon the ground, and though it caused her great mortification, she went with them because it was a matter of obedience, which the Lord desires more than He does sacrifice.126 Nevertheless, in order to provide her Sisters with some recreation, she said to them, "You are short on prayer but long on conversation, for you have arrived at daybreak."

"Have no doubt, Sister," said Gracia, "but that it is quite natural for women to talk a great deal. I think this springs from the fact that, as we know very little, we need a great many words to make ourselves understood. And now sit down, and we will return to our story.

"It is fitting that we first give water to our mountain, for water is the element most necessary to human life, without which we could not live, and rivers and fountains beautify and fertilize the earth. And to show how God attends to such things, I will tell you what is written in Deuteronomy, chapter 8. There Moses says, in speaking to the people of God, 'For the Lord thy God will bring thee into a good land, of brooks and of waters, and of fountains: in the plains of which and the hills deep rivers break out.'127 And Isaiah says in chapter 41, 'I will open rivers in the high hills, and fountains in the midst of the plains: I will turn the desert into pools of waters, and the impassable land into streams of waters.'128 The rivers in our own province of Spain are not unworthy of admiration, as their waters possess great virtue and delicacy. For as I have said, our province lies to the north, so that our running waters are more wholesome and light because they are refined by the northerly winds of the septentrion and freed from the southerly winds of the meridian, which thicken the waters and fill them with vapors. And although counting and praising the multitude of rivers and springs would be a difficult task, I shall not fail further on to record them when I speak of the establishment of our monasteries, many of which are on the banks of mighty and distinguished rivers.

"Now I come to our purpose, to begin telling of the spiritual properties of this mountain: there is no lack of water where one may contemplate and speak of God's law, for as David says, 'And he shall be like a tree which is planted near the running waters, which shall bring forth its fruit, in due season. And his leaf shall not fall off.'129 And Job says, 'my root is opened beside the waters, and dew shall continue in my harvest.'130 Above all, this mountain is in the midst of that river that Saint John saw, 'proceeding from the throne . . . of the Lamb'131 and that fountain of living water from which Our Lord Christ invited the Samaritan woman to partake.132 Here the Lord calls to all who are thirsty, here are the waters of Siloe133 that flow in silence, here is where water is drawn from the stone. Oh, sweetest Jesus! Rightly do you endow us with water, the thing most necessary to human life. For indeed, most blessed Source and Spring, there is no life in our works if they be not showered by the water of your grace; we must seek you by roads and paths of water, for so your prophet says, 'thy way is in the sea, and thy paths in many waters.'134 You are the life, the truth, and the way, and this way must lead through the waters of tribulation; and thus, Sisters, it is not right that tribulations should be lacking in Carmel. For we do not praise and cherish Carmel on account of its great age, or for the many favors of the nobility that have been bestowed upon it, or because we dress in sackcloth, or because ours is the habit of the most blessed Virgin. All this would profit us little if we did not live here in imitation of Christ. This is the true way. Walk in Him, says our

124. Isaiah (Isaiah) 41:18.
125. Psalms 13:3.
126. Job 29:19 (this passage is incorrectly identified by Simeon de la Sagrada Familia).
parishioners of San Juan, where the hijosdalgos cast their lot. As indeed her parents and grandparents did. I have not found mention of any other brothers or sisters, nor did her father record the birth of any others than the eight sons and three daughters I have mentioned. I have in my possession the sheet of paper where this is written, as I have said, in our Mother's father's hand. As for Fernando, I have not been able to discover when or where he died, but I know he is no longer alive. Of all eleven children, the only ones still living are Pedro and Agustín de Ahumada, and Doña Juana de Ahumada, the mother of our dear Sister.

"On Wednesday the twenty-eighth of March, the eve of the feast day of Saint Bertoldo, Carmelite, this holy Mother was born, and by the great providence of the highest Lord this was the year 1515, a little less than three years before the ill-fated Luther declared his apostasy. For it is the custom of His Divine Majesty to foresee the remedy for misfortune. And since this son of perdition has not only been the cause of an infinite number of men being lost, but has also prevented and taken away Christ's consecrated virgins from the society of the Church and from His nuptial bed, it is just that, having sinned so often, He should also send sainthood women to repair the wrongs done to them. For He does not hold women in little esteem. Among them, as I believe is shown in her life, the saint was chosen for this purpose, as we shall say later.

"With this zeal she began to found convents three years before the decrees of the Holy Council of Trent were published. Thus might the times, the world, and the name of Teresa show us that the Holy Trinity chose her so as to delight in her with the favors and gifts that she received through the consideration and communication of these three divine Persons, as our Lord Jesus Christ told her and shall be seen later, and through the particular devotion and spiritual exercise that she dedicated to the Trinity.

"From the time she was seven years old, God began to awaken her to virtue, she was also moved by the example of her parents, who were God-fearing people. All her brothers and sisters loved her, and her parents loved her more than their other children, because of the many graces the Lord had bestowed on her. Many were natural graces and others, which the Lord communicated to her through her many holy exercises, were supernatural.

"At that tender age of seven she would withdraw with her brother Rodrigo to read saints' lives, and when they saw the martyrdom that the saints suffered, they thought the saints paid very dearly for going to enjoy God, and they longed to die in the same way. Considering how they might achieve this, they agreed to go off to the land of the Moors and beg for the love of God that they make martyrs over there. It seemed to them that having parents was a great obstacle to their desire, and when they saw they could not carry off this plan, they agreed to be hermits in a kitchen garden at their house. As best they could they used to make hermitages out of little rocks, which would fall down immediately, and the children would be sad since they could find no way to fulfill their desires. They were very frightened to hear that hell pains and glory are forever, and they used to spend a great deal of time together talking of this over, repeating the word to each other: Forever, Teresa. And she would answer: Forever, Rodrigo. This truth, so worthy of consideration—that hell pain or glory is forever—so amazed the souls of these holy children that they would pronounce it very slowly, repeating it many times. With such lofty exercises in such pure souls, how much their virtues must have grown! And so this holy girl, from the time mentioned until the age of twelve, when her mother died, practiced giving alms, reciting her prayers and withdrawing in solitude (of which she was very fond). After her mother died, she went to Our Lady in grief over that loss and took her as her mother, and the saint says from that hour she felt that Our Lady protected her and assisted her in all her needs.

"When she grew older and began to mix with some pleasure-seeking company, as she tells it, she began to forget her first exercises and fervor and to give herself over to finery and strike up friendships, which she laments a great deal. She says she believes that until the age of fourteen and even later she had not offended the Lord mortally, although she always lets it be understood that the fear of God persisted in her soul, and that she never did anything knowingly that she understood to be a mortal sin. This way of life and these friendships gave rise to an affection which, although outwardly she always behaved with all modesty and honor, as a discreet and wise daughter worthy of her father, inwardly wreaked the havoc that such things do, tearing down all her spiritual foundation by cooling her love for God. In the end this matter resulted in certain rumors, and it was the cause of her father's taking her to a convent where persons of her quality were educated. Although on first arriving she was very distressed, with her gentle disposition she became consoled and made herself loved by all. Through her friendship with those holy nuns, she began to take to the idea of being a nun, a condition she had previously abhorred. Because she was so wise and the nuns removed the occasions of sin that had taken her away from her first fervent devotions, she returned to the latter and began persuading herself what a good and secure
TO THE SLANDERER.

Jealous one, if you dare
To attack my writings,
Show me where
You have done better than I tell of doing.
My practice is not words;
It is true results.
It amounts to shipwrecking in port
To talk without getting down to facts.

TO THE QUEEN.

MADAME,

I thought it would be too self-effacing of me, and show feeble courage, quite unworthy of having approached Your Majesty [not to dedicate this work to you—trans.]. For Your Majesty, in her absolute power, did me the honor of choosing me to serve you, in spite of the ill reports of me that some persons made to you. They did so because of my age, since, in their opinion, all knowledge is gained after a great length of time, and since, in their opinion, I had not professed the art of

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1 Bourgeois’s extravagant praise of her patron the Queen is a literary convention followed by many authors, both men and women, in the early modern era.
2 Negative reports may have come from some royal physicians or surgeons who knew Bourgeois at the court and were concerned about a woman claiming to be a medical authority. Such a report could have been issued by the surgeon M. Honoré, one of Bourgeois’s rivals, who was, according to Perkins, *Midwifery and Medicine*, 78, 160 n. 17, “the most sought-after man-midwife at the start of the seventeenth century.” Other negative reports may have come from Madame Dupuis, midwife to the King’s favorite mistress, Gabrielle d’Estrées; Bourgeois replaced Dupuis as royal midwife in 1601. Dupuis’s rivalrous feelings toward Bourgeois had already surfaced in 1598, when Bourgeois first applied for a license to practice midwifery. See Vol. 2, pp. 210–211, in this translation.
3 The original French word for “age” is *jeunesse*, or “youth.” Bourgeois became the royal midwife in 1601 at the age of thirty-eight. For this reason, I chose not to translate the word as “youth.” As the rest of the text clarifies, Bourgeois’s detractors thought her experience limited. To them, she might as well have been eighteen. —Trans.
midwifery for long enough. When Your Majesty saw me for the first time,⁴ your prudence knew to judge according to my desire to render you faithful service. Your Majesty knew that as great as my temerity was in daring to present myself before you, offering my services in receiving such a precious fruit,⁵ so too would I have great care not to harm that fruit and the branch from which it came. It is most necessary for the public good that several such excellent fruits be produced, since reports of the first fruit have cheered the spirit of not only the French people, but also of an infinite number of Republics.⁶ These reports have also created doubt and fear in those who might one day have wished to invade your Kingdom.

Thus it is quite reasonable that I take pride in being the first to have enjoyed knowledge of this happy news, and that I give thanks to the King and to you, Madame, for entrusting such a priceless treasure to my hands. Glorious in such a victory, it is also reasonable that I be the first woman of my art to take pen in hand to describe the knowledge of this art that God gave me, in order to make known the mistakes that can occur, and the best way to practice this art well. These mistakes are most often unknown to very learned Physicians and Surgeons, because of the intimate nature of a midwife’s work, the care of which must be done according to what is possible. Ordinarily, the modesty of our sex cannot permit doctors and surgeons to acquire this intimate knowledge except via the midwife’s report, which is not always true, sometimes through ignorance and sometimes through the shame of confessing her mistake. In conclusion, Madame, I humbly beg Your Majesty to receive kindly this little work, which I dedicate to you, although it may not be worthy of being presented to Your Majesty, whom I most humbly beg to accept my readiness to serve as the greater thing, from one who desires to live and die as

Your very humble and very obedient subject and servant,
LOUISE BOURGEOIS.

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⁴ See pp. 217–18 in this translation; and McTavish, *Childbirth and the Display of Authority*, 82–83. As Bourgeois portrays it, this first meeting (more a viewing) refers to the critical moment when the queen chose Bourgeois, based on appearance alone. See, AKL, “The Life and Works of Louise Bourgeois,” this volume.
⁵ That is, the future King Louis XIII, born on 27 September 1601, the first child and first son of Marie de Médicis and Henri IV. —Trans.
⁶ That is, the birth of Louis XIII. A newborn was often referred to as a “fruit.” Bourgeois uses the term in the original French title of this text when she uses the phrase “loss of fruit” (*perte de fruit*) to refer to miscarriage. —Trans.
TO THE READER.

Good Reader, this child of my mind, this creature of the merits of the greatest Queen that heaven has sent, does not display itself to you in order to be admired for the vanity of its language, as others today are wont to do. It tells you, as one of its true maxims, that it has no Ariadne’s thread to lead you, with sweetly false pleasure, along the contours of a labyrinth of words. Therefore I have given it no ornament but truth, no reason but that of experience; no witness but that of all our sex, which experiences in itself what I write about it and which will never call my pen false. This is why I confidently cross the barriers of any apprehension and expose this work to all the strange things that envy, the mother of slander and the principal enemy of all praiseworthy actions, may whisper to the contrary. I reassure myself that when you call to mind the nature of this subject, you will praise my purpose and agree with me that it does not stem from a desire to put myself on display for admiration; rather, it is from a desire to show you, that gently forced by my natural inclination, which is to render service to everyone, I let myself be conquered by pity for what I saw and heard.

The birth, then, of this book, a sample of my practical experience, is a school where Medicine, married to a midwife’s industry, teaches everyone the admirable effects of its divinity. Prescriptions that have had excellent results are derived from this school, and are only shown to the world in order to help those who do not have the money or the opportunity to consult a Physician. I do not wish to importune you any further (Good Reader) and I beg you to remember that this woman, in order to serve all other women, shows you, as in a mirror, things in which there is as much truth as there is lack of artifice.

Bourgeois uses this section, “Au Lecteur” (To the Reader) to establish her right to publish and speak as an “other voice” in a truthful, credible manner for the public good.

See Pierre Grimal, The Dictionary of Classical Mythology, trans. A.R. Maxwell-Hyslop (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985). According to the myth to which “Ariadne’s thread” refers, the city of Athens, bound by the terms of a treaty, periodically sent seven young men and seven young women to the city of Crete to be sacrificed to the monstrous Minotaur, a half-human, half-bull, who was kept in a labyrinth. The Cretan princess Ariadne fell in love with the Athenian Theseus and gave him a ball of string and a sword to help him find his way around the labyrinth and kill the Minotaur. —Trans.

in her speech; she begs you to receive this book with as much affection as she desires that all who will use it may say: *In an artlessly laid-out garden of the art of midwifery, I recovered the precious flower of my health.* I beg you again to receive kindly the fruits of this first printing, which were necessary to harvest and hurry to taste before maturity, before chance and my usual obligations might have given me more time to examine it; it was also as necessary to satisfy the Printer's haste as to shut the mouth of the slanderer who weighs my ability against the weight of his judgment; I promise you, if you wish it, to repair this fault in a less-hastily reviewed second edition. Adieu.

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THE BOOK TO THE
Readers.

An honor caused me to be written,
A malicious liar almost had me suffocated,
A slanderer had me scolded,
Of the three, honor made me triumph.

Excerpt from Volume II

[197] ADVICE TO MY DAUGHTER

My daughter, since all the best things in the world come from different countries, those who have travelled can discuss these things better than those who have only read or heard about them. I tell you then, that anyone of sound judgment should not be ignorant of anything noteworthy that has happened in their place of birth, so that he can accurately discuss and describe it to those curious to know more. I exhort you to research carefully and accurately everything worth knowing about in your place of birth. I will now tell you

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10 This title in French is “Instruction à ma fille.” The word *instruction* is translated here as “advice,” since that is how it has been rendered by various English-language scholars over the years. *Instruction* suggests not only advice, but also the idea of teaching. This section has a much longer title in the original table of contents (p. xx) —

On the novelty of this essay, its significance, and its relationship to Bourgeois’s sense of professional identity, see Rouget and Winn’s introduction to *Récit véritable*, as well as the longer essay by Winn, “De sage(-)femme à sage(-)fille.”

11 Bourgeois uses the formal “vous” throughout this section. Although in addressing her daughter she might be expected to use the informal “tu,” this letter is clearly intended for the general public. In addition, it was not uncommon for members of the upper bourgeoisie, like Bourgeois, to use “vous,” even among intimates. —
about your origins and mine as well, so that you may follow my precepts, and [198] better know your country.  

12  I was the head of the household, with children to care for. I was overcome by the vicissitudes of war and of the loss of our land and possessions. Wise Phaenarete, mother of the great philosopher Socrates, took pity on me, consoled me, and advised me to embrace her learning.  

13  She told me that everything would work out well for me if I believed her. She said that all the disciples of her son Socrates would be well-disposed towards me because of her, since I would be her adoptive daughter; and that my husband, who practiced the manual work of surgery, would guide me.  

When Lucina, goddess of childbirth, jealous of her reputation, saw that Phaenarete had bestowed such great favors upon me, she became envious and bestowed her favor upon me as well.  

14  She taught me what steps to take in certain situations, and to imitate the way she appeared. And she ordered Mercury, with all the power [199] that the gods had given her over him, to lead me to the most illustrious places in this kingdom, even to the births of those stars that shed their light on France and the kingdoms of Spain and others of the greatest realms in Christendom.  

15  Be advised, my daughter, that you can be a better midwife than I was, for you are the granddaughter of Phaenarete, a disciple of Lucina, and mistress of Mercury, because Lucina made Mercury subject to your mother.  

16  You were born when I was practicing the art that wise Lucina taught me, five months before the birth of the most beautiful star to be born in France for a hundred years,  

17  when Mercury guided me to the wilds of Fontainebleau through the intermediary of the wise children of Socrates. Once you make yourself deserving of their kindness, it will never fail you. For you are the child of a

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12  On the novelty of this essay, its significance, and its relationship to Bourgeois’s sense of professional identity, see Rouget and Winn’s introduction to Récit véritable, as well as the longer essay by Winn, “De sage(-)femme à sage(-)fille.”  

13  Phaenarete was also identified as Hippocrates’s mother; but whether a historical or fictional figure, or a combination of both, Phaenarete was known as an ancient midwife. Bourgeois invokes her as a professional ancestor whose legacy she hopes to preserve through her own daughter. In contrast, male physicians of Bourgeois’s era invoked Hippocrates, Galen, Soranus, and Asklepias as their medical forefathers. See Hanson, “Phaenarete,” 162; and King, Hippocrates’ Woman, 63.  

14  In Roman mythology. —Trans.  

15  “Those stars” are the six children of Henri IV and Marie de Médicis. The “kingdoms of Spain” are referred to in the original as “the Spains,” and comprise Aragon, Castile, and León. —Trans.  

16  In another vein, her desire to link herself and her daughter to an ancient and mythological medical lineage reflect her professional aspirations. See AKL, “The Life and Writing of Louise Bourgeois,” in this volume.  

17  King Louis XIII. This means Bourgeois’s daughter was born in May 1601. “Hundred years” here should not be understood literally, but as a rhetorical flourish. It had been fifty-seven years since the birth of the last Dauphin, François II, in 1544. —Trans.
family in which your sister’s husband is a physician, [202—sic] your husband is studying to become one, one of your brothers is an apothecary, your father is a surgeon, and I am a midwife.¹⁸ The entire body of the medical profession is represented in our household.

¹⁸ This and the following pages of the text are misnumbered by the printer. Page 199 is followed by 202 (skipping 200 and 201) and 203; 202 and 203 are then repeated, and we have marked these as 202a and 203a. Consecutive numbering picks up again at page 206.
CHAPTER IV

[...] This was the inevitable moment for my birth, decided by eternity. I was born with the caul with only my face, arms and legs free. I was hairy all over my body and had a strong, coarse voice. All this made the midwives who delivered me believe that I was a boy. Their shouts of joy filled the whole castle, and for a moment they even fooled the king himself. Hope and desire deluded everyone, and the women [the midwives] were most embarrassed when they saw that they had been mistaken. They wondered how they would tell the king the truth. Princess Catarina, the king’s sister, agreed to do it. She carried me in her arms in such a way that the king himself would be able to see and understand what she was too afraid to tell him. She thus gave the king the possibility to see the truth for himself. But this great lord showed no sign of surprise and instead took me in his arms and welcomed me lovingly, as if he had not been let down at all. And he said to the princess: “Let us thank God, sister. I hope this girl will become as good as a boy. I pray that God will let me keep her, as he has given her to me.” The princess, who wanted to please him, said that both he and the queen were still young, and that the queen would give him another heir. But the king answered: “My sister, I am satisfied. God bless her.” After this, he sent me back with his blessing, and everybody marvelled at how happy he seemed. He commanded that Te Deum be sung, and that all the feasts customarily held when a male heir was born be arranged. In a word, he was in this moment as great as he always was. The queen however, was not told about my sex until she was fit enough to survive such a disappointment. I was given the name Christina. The Lutheran priest (The court chaplain) who baptised me then drew the sign of a cross with holy water on my forehead and enrolled me without knowing what he did from this happy moment amongst Your selected souls.¹ Because it is certain that what he did was counter to the ordinary proceedings of a Lutheran baptism. People even blamed him for this, as for a superstition, and he defended himself as well as he

¹ Christina grew up as a protestant. Sweden had been protestant since the early 16th century and fought on the protestant side in the thirty year war. After having abdicated however, Christina converted to catholicism.
could. The king said, smilingly, of me “She will become cunning, for she has fooled us all”. And I had hardly been born; until I proved that the astrologer’s predictions had been faulty. The king got well, the queen, my mother, was soon and happily out of her confinement, I was well and what more, I was a girl.

It is befitting, my Lord, that I thank you for the opposite of what that great man once did, when he gave thanks for not having been born a woman. I thank you, Lord, for letting me be born a woman. I thank you for this so much more since you have given me the grace of not letting any of the weaknesses of my sex attach themselves to my soul, which you by your grace have made all together manly, just like the rest of my being. You have used my sex to protect me against the vices and excesses that mark the country where I was born. And after you adjudged me to belong to the weaker sex, you none the less wanted to free me of its usual weakness. You have also freed me of its common state of dependence by letting me be born to a throne, from which I would rule alone. From my youngest childhood you have let me become aware of this great independence, which I have also known how to safeguard and which I shall safeguard until my death. If you had let me be born a man, it is possible that customs and the examples of other men would have destroyed me. Maybe I would, like so many others, have drowned all the virtues and talents your grace had endowed me with in strong spirits. Maybe my hot and fierce blood would have driven me to act shamefully with women, from whom I would have had a hard time to free myself. It is possible that the versatile (I find no other word to express what I want to say) mind which you have given me and which helps me to adapt to the different customs of all the peoples and cultures I stay with, eventually would have overcome the vehemence I feel towards wine and excessive drinking. Instead of trying to persuade my subjects to refrain from this dreadful vice, it is possible that I eventually would have got used to their faults to please them the more. At the very least I would have been at risk to waste the time that I now have spent on studies and on seeking the truth and obeying your commands on women instead. Allow me to admire your goodness, that in so many ways has chosen me and that has created a virtue, or a rather happy circumstance, from my greatest weakness.

The queen, my mother, who possessed both the virtues and the vices of her sex, could not be comforted. She could not tolerate me, because, according to her, not only was I a girl, but I was ugly. She was not entirely wrong, because I was dark-

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2 Christina is probably referring to the fact that the word versatile in French/versatila in Swedish is rather rare.
skinned like a little Moorish girl. My father, on the other hand, loved me dearly, and I responded to his affection in a way that much surpassed my age. I instinctively felt the difference between the virtues and opinions of my mother and my father, and I knew right from the start how to judge them fairly.

CHAPTER VIII

[...] The King left my education to the men who I have described earlier. Straight after they were appointed to be my tutors, they started with my education, and through your mercy, Lord, they did not labour in vain. In a short period of time I progressed in my studies and exercises in a way that vastly surpassed both my age and my sex. The King had ordered these men to give me an education suitable for a young man and teach me everything that a young prince should know, to be able to rule with dignity. He had said explicitly that he did not wish me to possess any of my sex’s usual ways of thinking and being, except that I be honourable and modest. In all other matters he wanted me to be like a young prince and commanded that I be educated in all the virtues and skills of a prince. My natural inclination coincided with this ambition, since I felt an unbearable aversion towards everything that women talk about and do. I turned out to be totally uncomfortable with women’s handicrafts and chores, and there was no possibility for me to improve in this. On the other hand, I learned many languages, the sciences and athletics very easily. At fourteen I had mastered all the languages, sciences and sports that I had been taught. Since then I have learned many things without the help of any teacher. It is certain that I needed no teacher to learn German, French, Italian and Spanish as I did not needed it to learn Swedish, which is my mother tongue. It was the same thing with the gallant sports. I was only taught to dance and ride a little, and none the less I have mastered these physical exercises quite well; the same goes for the use of weaponry, even tough I was never taught to handle any weapon. With other words, through all that others have taught me and through what I have learned for myself, you, oh Lord, have made me skilful in all the things a prince should master and in everything a princess can learn with honour. In addition, I was completely tireless.

3 Axel Bané, Gustaf Horn, Bishop Johannes Matthiae and Axel Oxenstierna.
often slept outside on the ground. I ate very little and slept even less. I could stay for two, three days without drinking, since I was not allowed to drink water and I felt an insurmountable disgust against wine and strong beer. The queen, my mother, gave me a hiding one time, when she caught me drinking the rainwater she used to wash her face. After this, I had to drink svagdricka, which is considered so base that only the most wretched drink it. But I drank it from necessity, since I still preferred it to wine and beer. [...] I could stand heat and cold without the slightest difficulty. I walked long distances and could gallop for a long time without becoming tired. I lived just as I wanted to without listening to the people around me.

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You know, Lord, that whatever bad slander there might be, I am innocent to all the nasty rumours with which people have attempted to taint my life. I confess that if I had not been born a woman, my temperament may have brought me to terrible excesses. But You, who throughout my whole life has made me love honour more than all kinds of pleasures, You have protected me from the misfortunes that my social position and my hot blood might easily have brought upon me. I would no doubt have married, had I not had the power to resist from desiring the pleasures of love. I knew the world all to well to not realise that a woman who wants pleasure, must have a husband. This is especially true for a woman of my standing, who only takes a husband to make him a subject, or a slave for her whims and fancies. I was born to a position where I among all men could have chosen the one that pleased me the best, for there was not a single man in the world who would not have been happy, had I wanted to give him my hand in marriage. I was all too conscious of my advantages to not have used them. If I had sensed any weakness in me I could have, like so many others, married to enjoy the many advantages of such a state; I would not have felt such vehemence against marriage (of which I have given many proofs) if it had been necessary for me. But You have given me a heart that would not devote itself to anyone but You. [...] I have one more fault, for which I have almost forgot to blame myself, namely that I have all too much despised the good habits of my sex, which has often made me appear as more at fault than I actually am. It was, however, too late that I realized this fault of mine. I cannot correct it now and have not wanted to go through the trouble of doing so. I even believe that I would have done better to completely liberate myself from these considerations [of what was

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4 Svagdricka is a for of sweet, low alcohol ale that has been used in Sweden since the 16th century.
appropriate for my sex], and that I have not done so is the only weakness I blame myself for.\(^5\) For since I was not born to submit to any such considerations, I should have made myself completely free from them, as my temperament and position enabled me to do […]

CHAPTER IX

[…] I feel it is my obligation to speak my mind when it comes to my guardians conduct at this time,\(^6\) and I do not hesitate to say that they were absolutely correct in not giving the queen mother any part to play in the government. Too many reasons have persuaded me on this point. And all the examples I have since seen in the world have convinced me. I believe that women should never rule. And I am so convinced about this, that I would surely have removed my daughters from the line of succession for the Swedish throne, if I had married. For I would without a doubt have loved my country more than my children, and it would be to betray the former to allow the female members of the royal line to inherit the throne. I should be believed all the more, since I speak against my own interests. I make a point of telling the truth even at my own expense. It is almost impossible for a woman to fulfil the duties of this office in a honourable way, whether she rules in her own name or for a child heir. Women’s ignorance, as well as their weakness of the soul, body and mind make them unfit for the royal calling. All the women that I have seen rule, in history and in the world, have made fools of themselves in one way or another - I do not consider myself an exception to this rule, and I am prepared to point out my faults, when I have them. And if there have been women who have fulfilled this high duty honourably, no conclusion can be drawn from that fact. Such examples are so rare, that they cannot lead to any favourable conclusion for the sex as a whole, and my example even less so, since I was raised for this office from the cradle. I any case, my own experience has taught me, that the weakness of the sex is the greatest of all weaknesses. I do not want to claim that my mother would not have been as fit to rule as any of the queens or queen mothers that we have seen in our time. But to tell you the truth, they would have been as unfit as rulers as she was.

\(^5\) The only weakness when it comes to Kristina’s view of her own sex. She admits many other weaknesses in other areas.

\(^6\) The time when Kristina’s father Gustavus Adolphus died. Kristina was then 5 years old.
Whatever their flatterers might say, I have not seen anyone better than her in these other women. But I believe she was lucky to not have been included in the dreadful duties of ruling a state. And it was the most concrete proof of his affections that the king, my father, could show her, to exclude her from the government. Without a doubt she would have ruined everything, as they [women] all do, who meddle with such things [...]