Doubling and Omission in the Text of Anne Ferrand/Bélise

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Anne Ferrand's anonymously published novel, *L'Histoire de Cléante et Bélise* (1689, 1691),¹ and the love letters included with it (1691) capped with scandal a notoriety that had begun in 1686, when her husband, the magistrate Michel Ferrand, instituted legal separation from his wife after ten years of marriage. Keys to manuscripts, letters, and other public notices show that contemporary readers connected fiction with lawsuit and read the novel as the inside story of Mme Ferrand’s affair with Louis-Nicolas Le Tonnelier de Breteuil, begun in 1680 and ended, the letters imply, some two years before the court action. A thousand persons know of the affair, remarks one of the novel’s narrators, and that figure was increased, in a 1696 manuscript note, to an expressive if hyperbolic 10,000.²

The scandal of Mme Ferrand’s writing brought some exclusions, especially from the society over which Mme de Maintenon held sway. “Je trouve les femmes plus méprisables dans la dévotion que dans la galanterie” (72), Bélise had written and was no less direct about herself: “Je n’ay ny le bonheur ny la foiblesse de devenir dévote, & vous pouvez vous asseurer que vous ne me verrez jamais que philosophe amante & fidelle . . .” (27–28). For at least one key-supplying reader of *Les Caractères*,³ and enterprising publishers for over a century,⁴ Anne Ferrand’s letters put her into another company, that of Heloise and the narrator of the *Lettres portugaises*. Bélise’s desire had already found this community: “Qu’une véritable passion est noble, & qu’elle inspire des sentiments élevés! Si jamais je parviens à avoir quelque mérite, je le devrai à la mienne. Je suis touchée d’émulation pour toutes les femmes qui en ont” (38).

Recent attention, almost exclusively to the technical and historical features of Anne Ferrand’s single published novel, has separated the constitutive letters and *recit* of what may be a historically unique text.⁵ Like the earlier biographical tradition which conflated the Bélise of the text with the historical Présidente Ferrand, this new criticism also separates the
writer Anne Ferrand/Bélise from other texts, later extant writings left in manuscript during her long life (1657?—1740). My intention here is to bring these texts together and with them the image of the woman to be found in legal documents that gave Anne Ferrand a place among the curiosities of legal history. The resulting interplay of textuality points finally in her writing to a central drama obscured by traditional interpretative scenarios of the femme abandonnée and/or mal-mariée. With this disclosure comes, I believe, clarification of what the act of writing meant for this woman who first wrote about her life during five years of confinement enforced by lettres de cachet.

1. A femme forte

Shortly after Mme Dacier’s death, Anne Ferrand wrote a lengthy and detailed letter about her. Distinction as a scholar initially seemed, she confesses, good reason for not making Mme Dacier’s acquaintance. But friendship and admiration followed the surprise of meeting a remarkable woman “qui ne faisoit jamais sentir le Moi” (184)—happy and devoted in marriage and motherhood, practical in management and an idealist of firm commitment, as sensitive in conversation as in her love of music. The fullness of Anne Lefèvre Dacier’s life, different from her own in so many way, captivated Anne Ferrand and elicited in her letter a response of friendship remarkable in its fullness. When the easy tone of the letter changes, as it does three times during its reminiscences, much is revealed about the writer Anne Ferrand. To one of these changes, especially significant for the writer’s sense of difference, I shall return in my concluding section; the other two, related as they are, suggest a strategy fundamental to her writing.

Evoking the “prétendues fautes” other scholars found in Mme Dacier’s “excellents ouvrages,” Anne Ferrand launches a general denunciation of male vanity: “Je n’ai pu m’empêcher de soupçonner les hommes de voir d’un œil d’envie la science dans les femmes, et que ce ne soit à eux que nous devions nous prendre la puerile éducation que Ton nous donne.” Continuing to meditate combatively, she describes the triumph of Mme Dacier as that of a style containing the best that men have to offer and going beyond it. Mme Dacier’s writing has, she judges, “la force et l’exactitude du stile des hommes, jointes à une certaine douceur propre
aux femmes, qui rendoit sa maniere d’ecrire superieure a tout autre” (184°).

This judgment’s independence—from the emerging cliché that in polemics Mme Dacier’s prose was the “best man’s”—suggests Mme Dacier had won a reader in the always self-taught Anne Ferrand. She may well have begun at the beginning with what she calls the “excellent works” prepared with special pedagogical care and skill for another restive reader (the Dauphin). There douceur was evident both in Mme Dacier’s desire to address her text to an adolescent and to convey filial piety in her continuation of the pedagogical and scholarly work of her father; “forcefulness and exactness,” in the establishment of text, in her self-assurance in annotation, and in at least one, uncharacteristic denunciation of male educators that Anne Ferrand echoes.7

The dédoublement Anne identifies, with its particular authority/superiority, speaks a long-cherished desire at work in the writings collected in view of a never-finished volume of memoirs recently begun when the letter on Mme Dacier was written.8 The intention of that project of writing, evident in part 1 of the papers, is a defense of Colbert that would be polemical as well as historical. Anne Ferrand applies the lesson taken from Mme Dacier’s style in an experiment of her own with dédoublement. She plays the stylistic game of hiding grammatical indicators of a nonmale narrator.

After a brief, conventional justification of “eye-witness” history, Mme Ferrand attacks the recently published Histoire d’Henriette d’Angleterre by Mme de Lafayette9 (sects. 7–20) and the abbé de Choisy’s Mémoires (sects. 21–36).10 Both are heatedly denied credibility for their misrepresentations of the minister’s character, actions, and historical stature. Choisy’s writing is simply gossip; Mme de Lafayette’s—significantly for the orientation of the sometime novelist now apprentice historian—a bad imitation of her novel La Princesse de Clèves.11 Commentary on these sources, to the end of the larger project, is subordinated to a shrewd historical analysis (sects. 2–6) of the anti-Colbertian feeling that they illustrate and unjustly continue.

Intelligent as she was, Anne Ferrand could not long have supposed that third-person narrative might shield the historical subject; nor could she have been unaware of its fundamental contradiction with the desire to speak her own truth. Although political subjects (and a recent unfounded implication in the Cellamare conspiracy)12 might make it seem desirable,
the narratorial "il" is less a strategy of clandestinity than one of a double, enforcing the historian's authority already evident in the vigor of its criticism. Other "titles" are prepared to the same end in the two series of reflections assembled in the shorter part 2 of the papers. Placed like "justificatory pieces," a series of moral reflections (sects. 38–55) professes an unassailable belief in God's order as the basis of all morality. This might be reassuring to anyone associating the writer with her son Antoine (d. 1719), who had frequented the circle of the Temple. The closing sentence of part 2 could be equally so to any reader who remembered Bélise's extravagance and disruptiveness: "Il y a en toutes choses une abondance vicieuse: le 'ne quid nimis' me paroit le chef-d'oeuvre du discernement."

The *ne quid nimis* topos here appears to be a kind of memorandum by the writer to herself for a closing "in beauty" she would need in the finished volume. At this stage of writing its conventional wisdom remains at war with the immediately preceding notes on satire, with the aggressive tone of earlier criticism, even with the moralist's assertive statements of principle. Few direct appeals to or use of authoritative sources occur; general allusions, like those to Pascal on humility, also seem notes for the future ornaments of a finished work. They soon give way, as do generalized principles, to the more congenial anecdotes and pointed questions of social comedy, as the *moraliste* considers the subjects of conversation, confidentiality and gossip, promises and lying, the proper spirit of almsgiving. The signs of authority summoned for the "je," engaging combat on several fronts, mobilize a special talent for spying out the ridiculous. This part of Anne Ferrand's voice (not unlike that of the fifth *Provinciale*) doubtless kept Rémon among others in her "salon" and prompted the comtesse d'Uzès to put a young kinsman to finishing school there.

The notes on satire reveal a woman still *insoumise*, issuing a double warning: "La piété, mal entendue, est dangereuse" (531) and "Il faut entendre raillerie." Indeed she wishes Mme Dacier had had one more lesson to teach her. Her desire specifically to go La Bruyère one better is inscribed as discontinuous reflections that pursued insistently assert her mind's right to free movement:

[56.] Dissertation sur le ridicule—Il me semble que c'est une curiosité raisonnable que celle qui nous porte à vouloir connaître la cause de nos sentiments. Aussi, après avoir joui du plaisir de voir, sur le théâtre et sur la scène du monde, beaucoup de différents ridicules, j'ai essayé de démêler en quoi consiste le *ridicule*. 
Il y a longtemps que j'ai souhaité que l'illustre Mme Dacier n'eût pas dédaigné de nous instruire . . .

[57.] Les Caractères de La Bruyère sont bons, et l'on ne peut douter qu'il n'eut de l'esprit; mais, je crois qu'ils pourroient être encore meilleurs. Il allonge ses descriptions sans nécessité, il semble qu'il veut faire voir qu'il sait les termes de l'art; affectation puérile, quand ces termes ne sont pas nécessaires pour l'intelligence du lecteur. [537]

To defend Colbert was also to defend François Bellinzani, Anne's father, who had risen to prominence through Colbert's patronage, then fallen into disgrace for alleged peculation after Colbert's death. At the heart of the "memoirs" is the daughter's account of attempts to visit her father (521), successful only through the offices of the duchesse d'Aumont. Success came too late: "le pauvre M. Bellinzani" was dead when his daughter reached Vincennes. The potentially Greuzian narrative is marred by no sensiblerie. And nothing detracts from the accusation of royal injustice to which it leads. "Sa majesté ne fut point susceptible du scrupule d'avoir causé la mort d'un homme qui avoit bien servi, et la ruine de sa famille, sur une fausseté" (522). Through her defenses, Anne's writing becomes a renewed act of friendship extended to Colbert's family. She retained ties, with Mme de Menars, and kept Colbert's daughters in a special place of reverence in her memories of difficult times. It was they, she confides, who had inspired her in her own grief to emulate courage.

The project of memoir-writing centers finally around a commemoration of Anne's friendships with women who had been kind to her. She returns that kindness to special friends and in her critical appraisal of sources defends others—like her mother's friends Mlle de la Vallière and the comtesse de Soissons—against a variety of thoughtless allegations, from the distortions of gossip to those made by historians mistaking their proper names. "Touchée d'émulation pour toutes les femmes" as Bélise once professed herself, the memoir-writer's community is one of friendship, rather than passion, which opens with "douceur propre aux femmes" to her own mother (née Louise Chevreau).

"Ma mère," Anne writes, giving away the stylistic game (510–11). And if the writer's fantasy had been to do La Bruyère one better, it could well have been for this additional defense that came with writing. La Bruyère, readers believed, had ridiculed Mme Bellinzani in the character of the parvenue Arfure. Filial piety had not earlier been available for
her, as Mme Ferrand's novel had shown the world that knew her mother. At the point of writing the "memoirs," however, it extends to the woman who was absent when needed by her daughter and for her own safety had fled to Brussels "déguisée en homme."

[32.] Les Le T[ellier] ne s'étoient pas contentes d'avoir fait périr en prison un homme, qui n'avoit rien à dire, mais qui auroit parlé s'il en fut sorti,—ils craignoient le courage et le ressentiment de Mme de Bellinzani, qui n'étoit pas moins bien instruite que son mari; on résolut de l'arrêter [...].[522]

By giving Louise Bellinzani her place in the adversity they had shared, the once-abandoned daughter who became Bélique rights with this writing, after her mother's death (1710), at least one wrong born with the creation of the dédoublement Anne Ferrand/Bélique.

2. A femme abandonnée

The distinguishing feature of Anne Ferrand's novel, technically and historically, is its shifting point of view. The text enacts an experiment, in dédoublement, largely unrecognized because of the unclear relationship of its parts. No sources have yet documented the exact moments, between 1684 and 1691, when the four segments of the text were composed nor the way they were combined for the Rouen printers who published the novel both in 1689 and 1691 without permissions and under false imprints. Like Anne Ferrand's later writings, however, this text inscribes its own desires for publication.

In part 1 of the Histoire an older and sadder Bélique recounts to Zélonide, one of a series of older confidantes, the adventures of her early adolescent attraction to Cléante and its history over almost a decade before it was shared. On the one hand, passion was allowed to become the driving force of her life—reason for self-cultivation as compensation for a lack of physical beauty, for her movements in society and at home, finally for the spontaneous "pledge" of a gift to him of II pastor fido—while on the other, she fought passion by flights from home, refuge in convents, counsel sought from older women. "Quelle honte pour une femme de dire la première qu'elle aime!" (19). Part 1 ends with the intervention of a suspicious mother and a father who "m'aimoit trop pour se résoudre à me perdre pour toujours." In her interest they abandon their
daughter to an arranged marriage, sealing the “cruelle destinée” of the *mal-mariée* told in part 2 when Bélise has recovered from the memory of that moment of abandonment (25).

Bélise again attempts to find shelter from passion, since “la vertu . . . jusques là ne m’avoit pas encore abandonnée” (28). Even in her family, through an unwelcome suitor, she discovers that she is not free from the pleasure of love with Cléante she had fantasized. Pleasure and vanity are clearly identified at the outset of the continuing confession of the abandonment of all virtue. It was she who pursued Cléante, largely through letters, overcoming his physical repugnance and moral distaste for her. In the retelling, moments of the shame of “indigne ardeur” alternate with a rekindling excitement as obstacles once sought now give way. Love comes alive again, indeed seems never to have been otherwise, as Bélise concludes—“Je l’ay toujours aimé & l’aime encore avec une ardeur qui n’eut jamais d’égale” (42).

As the *femme abandonnée* pursues her seduction, and the narrator gives herself to it, settings are rapidly noted, details of plots elided; other actors are at best bit players until their insistent presence forces her to take greater notice of them. “Mon père sur tout plus éclairé & plus jaloux qu’un autre. . . . et la violence dont il étoit sur tout ce qui me regardoit, l’aveugla . . .” (52). With this new abandonment by the father who had remained physically and financially present in his daughter’s household, the adolescent is audible. “Il m’ôta mon équipage & me fit garder à vuë. . . .” Henceforth the father is reduced to the common enemy, the “jaloux,” as Bélise’s mother unnamed in part 2 had already been. The rest of the family has no specified characterization apart from the importunate other. Bélise’s narrative ends with her triumph over this other by “persévérance et vivacités.” Again overcome, she abandons her friend and subsequently society itself, with the promise that the end of her tragic affair will be revealed to Zélonide in “la pluspart de mes Lettres.”

Part 3, which ends the 1689 printing, shifts to Cléante, though neither he nor Bélise is directly present. After “quelques années,” it is a friend of Zélonide (told Bélise’s story despite vowed confidentiality) who seeks the denouement and learns it at second hand from a very knowledgeable friend of Cléante (who also breaks confidence). What was once known only privately is now public record for others to examine and judge. And judgment is the question. The tone changes with an early signal of male point of view given by an allusion to the story of the matron of Ephesus. 21 That story becomes the framing exemplum for the completed narrative
of the would-be heroine Bélise. Finally fixed as the subject of a cautionary tale, and meriting no better, Bélise's "bizarre aventure" becomes "un portrait si terrible de la mauvaise foy de la pluspart des Dames" (59). Final judgment is thus humiliation.

Repeated airings of injured male honor for which Cléante is given moral justification necessitate a thickening of plot in part 3. Bélise is now seen as the fickle lover faithlessly abandoning Cléante as she had the husband in whose house, it is added, she had repeatedly hidden her lover. First from boredom during Cléante's two-year absence for a diplomatic mission—when Bélise wrote to him some of her finest letters (64)—then brazenly after his return, she conducted an affair with the grotesque rival of a "Pédant"—"ce petit colet!" (85). Moving in the direction of the contemporary nouvelle (of the "désordres de l'amour" variety), and away from the earlier narrative's confessional directness, Cléante's highly plotted story, within its third-person scaffolding, sets at a distance of severe moral judgment all those things most important to Bélise.

The letters that were the direct record of passionate life are reduced to the wit and art of an "artificieuse Bélise." Passion itself proclaimed in them as eternal becomes nothing more than time-bound, intermittent "emportements" of a violent temperament. Already reduced to the adversary in Bélise's scenario, her family is further humiliated. Its "affaires fort fâcheuses"—Bellinzani's fall—are held only to be a pretext for Bélise's "chagrin" (65). Subsequent alarm over surveillance (now without her father), like pleas to Cléante for discretion or even temporary separation, are viewed only as strategies to cover the new affair. Changes in circumstances that allow Cléante to visit her are now put down simply to Bélise's inexplicable caprice, to the point that Cléante's patience breaks in "la lettre la plus outrageante que le dépit & la rage puisse jamais dicter" (85). Bélise's unabashed admission of "preuves de son crime" justifies Cléante's decision to abandon Bélise "pour jamais à toute l'horreur de sa mauvaise conduite" (88). The closing paragraph of the Histoire justifies this judgment and apparently gives the last word to Cléante.

As promised, Bélise's letters are added, in the 1691 printing, seemingly as evidence for Cléante's case. The selected letters have an order of their own (as did most probably those circulated before the novel's publication). They neither correspond to the letters evoked in part 2 nor include any of those cited in part 3 as most incriminating Bélise during the last stage of the lovers' relations. The seventy-two letters, mostly short, all undated, now close with the separation of Cléante's voyage. The
ending “in beauty” was prepared in part 3 by praise of the letters of separation and has succeeded in its rhetorical intention for recent readers like Maurice Lever.

Bélise’s last adieu and solitude as she is abandoned, by a lover whose ambitions prolong absence, and abandons herself to silence and death are not without echoes of the Lettres portugaises. But like Racinian overtones they are fleeting. The dominant register is resolutely practical and briskly orders the course of the story the love letters memorialize. With unrelenting clarity about herself, physically and morally, and no illusions about the “naturalness” of her passion, Bélise typically refuses Cléante’s idealizing portrait. “On se connoit toujours malgré les efforts que fait l’amour propre pour nous tromper . . . je ne suis pas belle” (57–58; again, 63). Vanity is savored—“J’en jouis avec . . . plaisir” (49)—and Cléante is more than once warned against its power to blind as he is against other weaknesses. He has more than ample warning of Bélise’s special pleasures—“Je suis une amie difficile et une maîtresse glorieuse” (65) and “N’admirez vous point la foiblesse des femmes & leur légère?” (72).

The dédoublement of a male voice, as the letter writers themselves would hear it, is evident, in a letter on Cléante’s ambition worthy of a Cornelian father (no. 47). But that voice’s intermittent presence gathers cumulative strength throughout the letters: in the aggressiveness of the seduction pursued in the first grouping (nos. 1–25) as in the willful abandonment to pleasure of those at the center that celebrate mutual love (nos. 26–54). “Si j’étais homme . . .” (43) is often assumed.

Enjoyment of passion is at first fearful, inhibited in the temporary security of the eluded gaze of the family. “Je puis m’abandonner toute entière aux movemens de mon coeur, je suis délivrée de tout ce que je hais.” But sensual abandon radiates through the letters at the heart of the published collection. “Peut-on mieux faire que de travailler à se rendre heureux & peut-on l’être sans s’aimer . . . ?” (39). It is a repeated total gift of self that Bélise’s passion demands. Her desire remains inscribed in the commemorative closing letter and in her last words of part 2 before her withdrawal from society:

Je m’abandonne à vous & à la tendresse, sans réserve, & sans crainte . . . Jouissez de cette victoire, mon cher Amant. (35)
Abandonnons nous sans réserve à l’amour pendant le peu de jours qui nous reste à nous voir. . . . (55)
Cléante too is to be judged in terms of this absolute during separation and by inference after the reader's separation from the text:

Si vous m'aviez bien connue, vous ne m'eussiez point abandonnée pour elle [ambition]. (78)

Vous renoncez à des plaisirs . . . Savez que quand on veut être plus qu'un homme, on devient beaucoup moins quelquefois. Thésée fut moins blâmé d'avoir été sensible aux charmes d'Ariane, que de l'avoir abandonnée. (80)

The return to Bélise and the first-person of the letters reinforce the already striking differences that distinguish part 3 from the first two parts of the Histoire. But rather than see in part 3 Anne Ferrand's inventiveness in constructing a typical male narrative, looking forward uniquely in its time to relativist experiments (Jules Romains's Psyché, say, or Montherlant's Andrée Hacquebaut, whom Bélise sometimes curiously resembles), a continuing male critical tradition has without external evidence contested her authorship. At one point, the hypothesis goes, Breteuil/Cléante intervened and through a hired author—Fontenelle?—inserted the last word on Bélise. Part 3 is held to be the man's writing, marked as it is by judgment; 1–2, with its passionate first-person, the woman's (a fortiori an Italian woman's). In the perspective of Anne Ferrand's later writings, and the letters as published, these lines of argument cannot be taken seriously. "Il faut entendre raillerie," she warned, and engaged it through dédoublement. Irony is the weapon of a desire for vengeance that began with a renewed self-affirmation found in writing.

Irony, and self-punishment with it, is initially audible in the name chosen for Anne Ferrand's persona. The inescapable association with Bélise is Molière's character, in Les Femmes savantes, whose delusion is that all men are courting her. Angry and disabused, the woman who later moved from particular "ridicule" to the question "en quoi consiste le ridicule" and reflected on La Bruyère may have found Molière's staging of Bélise's ridicule irresistible grounds for reflection. "Tu l'as voulu, Bélise" (to change plays) is as probable as any other response of Anne Ferrand's alert mind as she revised the letters for publication in 1691, and with freedom in sight, a fuller settling of accounts. That irony may be seen focused in the changed title of 1691, in which the older Bélise then writing excised the special pleading of the first title's "jeune Bélise." "On a peine à comprendre qu'une femme, peu éprise de son mari, dans un âge
 où l'on prend la vanité pour la gloire . . . ne fut point touchée de sa prétendue passion,” Anne reflected in her memoirs (524). In the clarity of loss, with the dark days of 1686–87, the distance for the same judgment on herself—through Cléante—could have been hers as probably as another’s.

Critical readers have from 1880 to the present invariably preferred Bélise’s letters over Cléante’s narrative. By comparison it has seemed conventional, wooden; Cléante himself, self-righteous and lacking in generosity. The placement of the letters as “justificatory pieces” by the ordinary legal logic of a writer surrounded by judges (as Anne Ferrand literally was in her husband’s family) turns against Cléante. The letters in fact force dissatisfaction with part 3, a questioning of its devices of storytelling, even a search for Cléante’s errors. Vanity rather than honor? Belief in gossip and appearances rather than an abiding love? Surely love could have been seen through the Pédant, in the circumstances of the Bellinzani débâcle? Or if the scenario were different, could not love with its old teasing spirit of complicity have been seen through a new ritual testing? The worst of Bélise gleaned in the letters is made literally true in part 3 and used against her to the point of overshadowing the fact that the worst of Cléante—his vanity and weakness—also if more insinuatingly appears there. Cléante’s final “moral portrait”—offered at second hand—elicits retrospectively from the reader of Bélise’s letters a response not unlike that Prévost invites with Des Grieux’s ambiguous “perfide Manon,” “perfides larmes.” The accounts closed by the writer in 1691 are balanced by a “femme forte qui se retire du monde.” Through Cléante’s final severity, as through Bélise’s raised tones, there remains an insinuating doubt: “Et cet Amant qui crie qu’on l’abandonne est peut-être tout prêt à m’abandonner” (57).

In Anne Ferrand’s letters, as Bernard Bray suggests, there is a pure melody of pleasure.29 But there is also an edge of nastiness, particularly in dealing with the “hated family,” not only the all-too-present-husband but also the absent mother. Exulting over foiling their surveillance, Bélise covets a satirist’s revenge: “Disons leur pour nous venger” (42). And when her husband waxes “galant,” she promises it—“la vengeance est certaine” (72). The promise is raised to a solemn oath: “Que l’union qui sera désormais entre nous serve de punition à ceux qui me persécutent, & qu’elle me venge de tout ce qu’ils me font souffrir” (47–48). With calculated self-interest “young Bélise” restrained this desire to avenge “les cha-
grins que me cause la bizarrerie de ma famille”: “Si je ne me contois pour beaucoup, j’agirois d’une manière que je leur ferois bien voir que je les conte pour rien” (62). After the death of her father, and with the destruction of her past in 1686–87, the desire is no longer restrained. The transgressive writing of the four parts of the text of 1691 is a self-affirmation that settles more than accounts with Cléante/Breteuil.

3. Mother and Daughter

As Anne Ferrand lingers over intimate scenes between Mme Dacier and her daughter, who died prematurely, her tone changes dramatically. Her own loss of a daughter and with it the difference of her own life from Mme Dacier’s break the text. Solitude had been her lot rather than the consolation friends and family offered Mme Dacier, “bonne mère, après avoir rempli les devoirs de fille.”

Cet endroit de ma lettre me rapelle le souvenir de mes propres pertes. Quelle douleur de voir périr ce qu’on a aimé, quand l’estime publique s’accorde avec notre tendresse! Mˡᵈ Dacier mêloit ses larmes avec celles d’une autre elle-même; et ce qui semblait augmenter son affliction servait à l’adoucir; mais mes larmes avoient tant de différentes causes, que je ne puis comprendre comment j’ai résisté à une situation si cruelle. Je suis presque honteuse de vivre. [f. 187]

The time of recollection in this moment of emptiness and lack is not simply that of the death in 1698 of Anne’s elder daughter, who died at twenty-one in Riom, far from her mother. The multiple causes of grief and shame reactivate the loss and solitude of the year 1686 and the following years of internment (at the abbey L’Eau-Notre Dame south of Chartres). Legal documents begin to show that Anne’s memories did not exaggerate. 30

Michel Ferrand made no secret of the “rixes” between spouses, mainly relating to Bellinzani’s disgrace, that raised his fear of more violence. Nor did he hide the fact that he could no longer tolerate life with the “daughter of a criminal.” 31 Although a separate establishment in the rue du Bac was legally stipulated, the Ferrands’ son remained with his father. If their two daughters lived with their mother at all, it could only have been briefly. The moment was right for them, at ten and twelve, to board at the nearby Filles de Sainte-Marie. There the younger remained. With the
elder's betrothal during her exile, Anne Ferrand in fact lost both daughters in 1686–91.

When the letter on Mme Dacier was written it was thus too late for Anne Ferrand to have with her own daughters the friendship so valued in her writings. And so it seemed too with her own mother, by transference, as Anne made amends to Louise Bellinzani: the daughter, the *Histoire* indicates, had not sought her friendship in adolescence and could not in 1686 when exile separated mother from daughter. Turning to writing during exile—rather than to devotion—the daughter had effected an act of independence from her mother. But her daughters are the major omissions of that text. They are cruelly subsumed by the generalized other, then again displaced by the “mon enfant” incongruously lavished on the lover Cléante. Like the dédoublement Bélise-Cléante at the moment of writing, the “mon enfant” becomes with this second displacement of memory a synecdoche of writing, now the shame of having written.

“Bélise” is born fully armed with the literary transformation of the letters to Breteuil, that of the épistolier into auteur-épistolier. Stylistic corrections, re-ordering, excisions, occasional rewritings all appear in the Arsenal manuscript. Typical of these procedures is the reworking of the last letter, admired by Maurice Lever for raising the femme abandonnée from melodrama to the tragic. But beyond excisions and other alterations of levels of style, emendation has special significance at this climactic moment.

1691: Je n'ai jamais été heureuse, et je meure encore plus malheureuse que je n'ai vécu. Si ma mort ne peut mettre ma gloire à couvert, et que ceux qui me haissent veulent, pour se venger de moi, publier ce qu'ils ont pu découvrir de mon aventure [. . . ] Asse, 155–56 [fac. ed., 89; emphasis added]

MS: Je n'ay vescu que pour vous. Je n'ay jamais vescue heureuse et je suis encore plus que je n'ay vescu si ma mere ne peut mettre ma gloire a couvert et [. . . ] [f. 14r]

Whatever is lost in revision, the suppression of the mother is gained. Following failure to forestall publication alluded to here, and with the felt abandonment of 1687–91, se venger is defiantly enacted by writing for publication (Cléante is of course also served as Bélise herself preempts her challenge to him—“publiez mes lettres si . . .”). This closing letter, originally part of the earliest sequence charting the course of the love, translates Louise Bellinzani from a point of usefulness in it (revealingly,
since this role is elided in the *Histoire*) to the climactic instance of failure. The apparently semic link *mère/mort* at this moment of lack and abandon­ment again opens into the present particular events of 1686. Anne Ferrand in her last years was forced to dwell on them and to relive the association mother/death with new cruelty.

Seven months after separation from her husband, in November 1686, Anne Ferrand gave birth to a third daughter. The baby was taken from her for nursing, it was later revealed, and was not returned to her before her exile. In 1725, in the wake of Michel Ferrand’s death (1723), a thirty-nine-year-old woman appeared claiming her part in the estate as the Ferrands’ last and indeed long lost daughter. Mme Ferrand and collateral heirs contested, then appealed the judgment won for the plaintiff by the illustrious Cochin.35 The legal documents of what became twelve years’ litigation, as complicated as any novel, afford a last dramatic view of Anne Ferrand—unable or unwilling to find in this woman the daughter and friend she desired for her own advanced age, unable as well perhaps to maintain the “reprieve” of Louise Bellinzani the dutiful daughter granted in the first stages of memoir-writing.

Her mother, Anne’s testimony divulges, had lied to her: “She informed me that the baby had died.”36 Evidence was produced and sustained that Louise Bellinzani had in fact had the infant christened as a foundling, then arranged through servants for pensions under a variety of assumed names through a succession of convents. Taking on what she supposed were her mother’s charities, Anne testified, she continued support of this girl, who was identified to her as the illegitimate offspring of her younger, wayward brother. That birth had been hidden, after Bellinzani’s death, to avoid further troubles for the family that he then at least nominally headed (after leaving his monastery at eighteen).

Whether or not Anne Ferrand finally accepted that her mother had lied to her about her youngest daughter’s death, she could not have avoided reflection on the possibility. And she could not have escaped some painful reflection on the inextricably linked relationships she had had with her own daughters. Having outlived immediate family, Anne Ferrand retired to the convent du Cherche-Midi for the last year of her life. Accounts with Breteuil and with Michel Ferrand had long been closed, the drama of the *mal-mariée* closed by her own writing and by litigation.37 But the *femme abandonnée* again alone had yet some dramatically unsettled accounts on which to reflect in the final shelter of the convent that she had once upon a time so clamorously sought.
NOTES

1. 1689 title: HISTOIRE / NOUVELLE / DES AMOURS / DE LA JEUNE / BELISE / ET DE CLEANTE. / Divisée en trois parties, / Par M. D.*** / Suivant la copie imprimée à Paris. Eugène Asse's ed. (Paris: Charpentier, 1880) has not been replaced; for convenience all references are to the facsimile presented by René Godenne (Slatkine, 1979).

2. B.N. MS. fon. fr. n.a. 4040, f. 58v.


4. Reprinted in 1696 (The Hague); 1699 (Amsterdam); 1701 (The Hague); 1702 (Amsterdam); 1714 (Brussels); 1716 (The Hague); 1721 (Rotterdam); 1725 (Amsterdam); 1738 (Anvers); 1760 (London); 1777 (London).


7. On Mme Dacier’s lack of militancy, see Farnham, pp. 50–51 and passim. The exception is the dedication to her Delphin ed. of Callimachus.

8. The MSS. have seemingly disappeared from public domain. Published with minimal textual annotation by Marcel Langlois, RHLF 32 (1925): 497–528. On the basis of references to published works cited, part 1 dates between 1720–1727; nothing indicates dates for the several separate series of part 2.

9. Amsterdam, 1720.

10. Utrecht, 1727. Reflections are uniquely in the form of a letter to an unidentified friend.

11. P. 509. It is unclear whether A.F. considers the “mauvaise imitation” by Mme de Lafayette herself or another writer.


13. On Antoine Ferrand, see Asse, pp. lxxiii, 261–70.

14. Pascal, pp. 531, 535 (on “raillerie”); Montaigne, p. 516; Plutarch (the only textual citation), p. 532.


16. Langlois’s typology of the précieuse on the model of Mme de la Sablière (pp. 497–98) is at best approximate. The points concerning religion are contradicted by the text edited.

17. On the scandal of the “pièces à quatre sols” and Bellinzani’s still undetermined part, see Lionel Rothkrug, Opposition to Louis XIV . . . (Princeton:

18. Marie de la Grange Neuville, wife of Jean-Jacques Charron de Menars, 
brother of Mme Colbert. An extant undated letter of A.F. is addressed at Menars 

19. P. 596: “... les filles, dont la sagesse et la piété ont été hors de toute 
atteinte, et qui a produit des retours dans ceux que la jeunesse et le mauvais 
exemple avaient écartés.” If the underscoring is in the MS., Langlois’s claim for 
self-confession seems justified.

20. “Des biens de fortune,” 16 (1st ed). Louise Cheveau was the daughter of 
a notary.

21. Satyricon, p. xi. The story was an easily recognizable commonplace of 
less than hardcore misogynistic writing.

22. A note to B.N. MS. n.a. 4040 identifies the “Pédant” as abbé Miramion; 
P. Bonnefon argues for abbé Lannion, L’Amateur d’autographes n.s. 5 (1905), 

23. A MS. “vers 1688” is cited after the Claudin catalogue (1858) by Fernand 
Drujon, Les Livres à clef... (Paris: E Rouveyre, 1888), I: 468–69. Arsenal MS. 
3809 is certainly prior to 1689 and perhaps corrected in A.F’s hand. B.N. fon. fr. 
n.a. 4041 is posterior (1691–96?). A fourth MS. is cited after the Pierre Louÿs 
catalogue (1929) by Y. Guiraud, Bibliographie du roman épistolier (Fribourg: 
contain the letters.


25. See e.g., B. Bray, Lettres portugaises..., p. 31. Parallels with the 5th and 
the 4th Portugaises cannot conclusively be identified as textual citation.

26. Phèdre (v. 89) may be heard here; but the primary reference is Plutarch’s 
life of Theseus (section 24).

27. Elaboration is primarily Langlois’s (pp. 499–501). His suggestion of Fon-
tenelle’s authorship is discounted by Alain Niderst, Fontenelle à la recherche de 
sentation,” pp. 3–7. Bernard Bray (p. 30) implicitly departs from this tradition.

28. The point has often been made that “Bélise” derives from the French 
pronunciation of Bellinzani; the Molieresque association is made but not deve-
developed by Langlois. It is supported by the recurrent theme of Bélise’s lack of 
physical beauty.

29. Lettres portugaises..., pp. 30, 182.

30. I have used B.N. MSS. D’Hozier, P.O. 1127, 1128; D.B. 265; Carrès 254. 
The principal documents may be found in Asse.

31. See Asse, pp. xlv–viii. The act of separation is given, p. lxv, n.3.

32. Pp. 8, 26, 34. “Correction” to “mon amant” occurs in some instances in 
the Arsenal MS.

33. See above (note 23). I have considered the order and corrections of this 
MS. elsewhere. The MS. was not used by Asse.

34. The last published letter is 13th in the MS. (f. 12v–16). In Asse’s conjec-
tural dating it, as well as the two preceding letters, would thus be closer to 1680 than 1684.


36. Interrogatoire du 12 août 1735. See Asse, lxx, n. 2.

37. After Michel Ferrand's death, A.F. sought the return of 156,000 livres from his estate. See Asse, p. xlii, n.3.

*It is a pleasure to thank The College of Humanities of the Ohio State University for the Faculty Professional Leave during which my research on Anne Ferrand was done.