

Post-Pastoral Possibilities: Nature and the Literary Imaginary in Early Modern France

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## Introduction

### Placing Early Modern Pastoral: “Sur les chemins de *L’Astrée*”

En approchant de Lyon je fus tenté de prolonger ma route pour aller voir les bords du Lignon: car, parmi les romans que j’avis lus avec mon père *L’Astrée* n’avait pas été oubliée, et c’était celui qui me revenait au coeur le plus fréquemment. Je demandai la route du Forez; et tout en causant avec une hôtesse, elle m’apprit que c’était un bon pays de ressource pour les ouvriers, qu’il y avait beaucoup de forges, et qu’on y travaillait fort bien en fer. Cet éloge calma tout à coup ma curiosité romanesque, et je ne jugeai pas à propos d’aller chercher des Dianes et des Sylvandres chez un peuple de forgerons. La bonne femme qui m’encourageait de la sorte m’avait sûrement pris pour un garçon serrurier.

-- Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Les Confessions*, IV

What happens when literary landscapes come into contact with the ‘reality on the ground’ of the people and places they represent? Can pastoral literature, and in particular early modern pastoral, do any of the work for us as we struggle to articulate our twenty-first century relationship with nature, or is it simply a pleasant illusion that fractures upon contact with the ‘real’ world? I begin this dissertation’s exploration of the pastoral at the place where literary representations of nature and lived experience of nature converge. At this point of contact the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century pastoral texts that I discuss in the following chapters erode the boundaries between nature and culture, and a host of

other associated dualisms as well: leisure and labor, feminine and masculine, literary and scientific, imaginary and real, domestic and political. I argue that the pastoral is a literary mode that has been devalued based on its association with the first term in these pairs. But rather than asserting the value of pastoral by demonstrating its association with the ‘stronger’ term in these dualisms, I show how these categories are dismantled in the works of three early modern authors. By modeling ways to get past these dualisms, early modern pastoral can inform contemporary debates within the growing field of environmental humanities.

Broadly defined as a field that takes an “earth-centered” approach to literature, history, and philosophy, the environmental humanities attempt to create dialogue between various disciplinary approaches to the study of nature. Environmental literary critic Cheryll Glotfelty clarifies the role of the literary scholar within this interdisciplinary project: “Literary scholars specialize in questions of value, meaning, tradition, point of view, and language, and it is in these areas that they are making a substantial contribution to environmental thinking” (xxii).<sup>1</sup> As I will discuss in greater detail later on in this introduction, while environmental literary critics, or ecocritics, have begun to explore early modern texts, the relevance of these texts to modern environmental issues has not been established. Instead, the early modern period tends to be treated as a distant and dormant Arcadia, the nature to our twenty-first century culture. As we shall see however, the nature and literature of this period is not disconnected from present events such as

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<sup>1</sup> See Cheryll Glotfelty’s introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, eds. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996).

ecological crisis; rather, it can be put into productive conversation with twenty-first century work on the relationship between humans and the environment. As a point of departure for my discussion of early modern pastoral, I consider the most well known pastoral novel of this period, and one of the most iconic examples of the European pastoral tradition, Honoré d'Urfé's *L'Astrée* (1607-1627). A look at the critical issues raised by the text provides an introduction to what is at stake in the pastoral literary mode, allowing me to situate the pastoral in relation to the field of environmental humanities.

The popularity of pastoral literature at the turn of the seventeenth century is often attributed to a desire for a return to calm and stability, for a fresh start after the horrors of the wars of religion. It is this collective desire, along with the publication of one of its most well-known literary manifestations, that lead Marc Fumaroli to characterize this period as marking the return of Astrée, the goddess who, according to Ovid and Virgil, left earth to flee the evils of civilization, and whose return would signal the coming of a new Golden Age.<sup>2</sup> In 1607 appeared the first of five volumes of Honoré d'Urfé's enormously popular pastoral novel *L'Astrée*.<sup>3</sup> From its opening pages, the novel

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<sup>2</sup> See Marc Fumaroli's chapter "La Période 1600-1630: Le Retour d'Astrée," in *Précis de Littérature Française du XVIIe Siècle*, Jean Mesnard, ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1990) 47-64.

<sup>3</sup> D'Urfé passed away after completing the fourth volume of *L'Astrée*. The concluding volume was written by his secretary, Balthazar Baro. In 1626, Marin le Roy de Gomberville published his *Suite de L'Astrée*, which appears in some editions as a sixth volume. Numerous studies have traced the influence of *L'Astrée* on seventeenth-century authors of prose, poetry and theater, including Gomberville, La Calprenède, Scudéry, and Sorel (who satirized *L'Astrée* and pastoral tradition in his *Le Berger Extravagant* (1627)). See especially Leonard Hinds, *Narrative Transformations from L'Astrée to the Berger Extravagant* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2002) and Madeleine Bertaud,



advertises its disconnection with the actual conditions of rural life. The inhabitants of the idyllic Forez region of fifth-century Gaul are not, as d'Urfé writes in his preface, “ces bergères nécessaireuses qui pour gagner leur vie conduisent les troupeaux aux pâturages” (7). They are shepherds not by birth but by choice, motivated by a desire to escape the corruption of the city for the tranquility of the countryside. As the shepherd Celadon explains, the retreat from society that creates the pastoral community of the Forez is also motivated by the Gauls' desire to break away from the Roman Empire:

il y a plusieurs années, d'un accord générale, tous ceux qui étaient le long des rives de Loire, de Lignon, de Furon, d'Argent, et de toutes ces autres rivières, après avoir bien reconnu les incommodités que l'ambition d'un peuple nommé Romain [...] d'un mutuel consentement jurèrent tous de fuir à jamais toute sorte d'ambition, puis qu'elle seule était cause de tant de peines, et de vivre, eux et les leurs, avec le paisible habit de bergers. (48)

Thus *L'Astrée* links the origins of a distinctly French cultural identity with the decision to adopt the dress and lifestyle of shepherds. D'Urfé prefaces his novel with a message to Henri IV, crediting the king with having created a peaceful, tranquil Europe. In this preface, D'Urfé blurs the boundary between pastoral fiction and historical reality, and between the work of the writer and that of the king. As the author of a new era of peace, d'Urfé reasons that Henri IV should consider himself by extension the writer of the novel that depicts that peace, “car véritablement on vous en peut dire l'Auteur” (4). The examples of noble civility and perfect love modeled by *L'Astrée's* shepherds and

shepherdesses shaped social practices of seventeenth-century courtiers. Aristocratic readers gathered to act out their favorite scenes.

In addition to functioning as an etiquette guide that ushered in changes in aristocratic moral and social codes, *L'Astrée* is most often discussed as a transitional work that bridges old and new worldviews, a political allegory of contemporary political and social changes taking place at the opening of the seventeenth century. The novel treats the shift from feudalism to absolutism (Elias), and from traditional medieval and renaissance romances to a more distinctly premodern narrative form (Bertaud, Hinds).<sup>4</sup> Gérard Genette has described the text as “l'étroit goulet par où tout l'ancien se déverse, se renverse dans tout le moderne” (8).<sup>5</sup> For some critics, *L'Astrée*'s ‘modernity’ manifests itself as an unprecedented tension between social realism and literary idealism that continues to evolve throughout seventeenth-century art and literature (Hinds, Wyngaard). D'Urfé's pastoral novel figures as a kind of threshold between a distant, archaic form of literature and one that speaks to modern readers. If parts of the novel are “unreadable” in the twenty-first century, Thomas DePiero argues that it is because *L'Astrée*, like other works of seventeenth-century pastoral and heroic fiction such as Scudéry's *Artamène ou le Grand Cyrus*, is a primarily aristocratic literary mode.<sup>6</sup> There is perhaps something about pastoral convention itself, with its lovesick shepherds and nymphs populating a

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<sup>4</sup> See Norbert Elias, *The Court Society* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983) 255-263.

<sup>5</sup> Genette's essay “Le Serpent dans la Bergerie” first appears as an introduction to his edition of *L'Astrée* (Paris: 10/18, 1964), and later in his *Figures I* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1966) 109-122.

<sup>6</sup> See Thomas DePiero, “Unreadable Novels: Toward a Theory of Seventeenth-Century Aristocratic Fiction,” *Novel: A Forum for Fiction* (Spring/Summer 2005): 129-146.

perfect green space, that seems alien and irrelevant in an era in which such landscapes and the people they traditionally support are under threat.

However, *L'Astrée* breaks with pastoral literary tradition in that it takes place in an identifiable geographic region, the idyllic bucolic landscape corresponds to a real place in the Rhone-Alpes region of France. D'Urfé set his novel in the Forez region along the Lignon River, his birthplace. So while we often think of pastoral nature as a setting that takes us out of time and out of history, *L'Astrée* creates an Arcadia that is locatable and specific. Thinking about *L'Astrée* as a representation of life in nature, rather than a representation of political events with an artificial natural backdrop, allows us to see the productive tension that runs throughout the text, and throughout critical readings of *L'Astrée*: the tension between pastoral fiction and social reality, between literary and lived nature.

What Madeleine Bertaud refers to as the “courant bucolique” in seventeenth-century literature is also represented by texts that portray the less idyllic, more labor-intensive side of rural life. Works such as Olivier de Serres' *Le Théâtre de l'Agriculture et Ménage des Champs* (1600) celebrate labor and agriculture as the way to a new Golden Age.<sup>7</sup> Jacques Demogeot speaks of *L'Astrée* and *Le Théâtre de l'Agriculture* as two manifestations of the same “mouvement d'idées,” both products of the tumult of the preceding years. He likens their relationship to that of two classical texts associated with the origins of pastoral, Virgil's *Eclogues* and *Georgics* (12). Many critics have described the changing aesthetics of seventeenth-century pastoral in terms of these two versions of

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<sup>7</sup> See Madeleine Bertaud, *Le XVIIe Siècle: Littérature Française* (Nancy: Presses Universitaires de Nancy, 1990) 44.

rural life -- the eclogue, where idle shepherds are principally occupied by singing and wooing, and the georgic, whose central figure is the peasant, often represented as engaged in the daily labors of rural life. In her *Pastoral and Ideology*, Annabel Patterson speaks of the tension in seventeenth-century pastoral between the figures of Cain and Abel, the farmer and the shepherd, the value of action versus contemplation. When pastoral is taken up in the debate between the Ancients and Moderns, these two strains of pastoral are presented as two aesthetic extremes to be avoided. Both Ancients and Moderns are united in their abhorrence of, on the one hand, the lack of *bienséance* of the hard working, plain speaking shepherds found in ancient pastoral, especially in the *Idylls* of Virgil's predecessor Theocritus, and on the other hand of the artificiality of modern pastorals like *L'Astrée*. Both sides of the debate are in general agreement about the need for a compromise of the kind described by Bernard le Bouvier de Fontenelle in 1688 in his *Discours sur la Nature de l'Églogue*: "entre la grossièreté ordinaire des bergers de Théocrite, et le trop d'esprit de la plupart de nos bergers modernes, il y a un milieu à tenir" (177). In her book *From Savage to Citizen: The Invention of the Peasant in the French Enlightenment*, Amy Wyngaard describes the tension between these two kinds of rural representation as leading to an eventual predominance of a more 'georgic' vision in pastoral art and literature in the eighteenth century.<sup>8</sup> Wyngaard traces a shift from

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<sup>8</sup> The story of the tension between the eclogue and the georgic, and the eventual predominance of the georgic mode in early-modern English literature has been told in many studies, including Anthony Low, *The Georgic Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), Alastair Fowler, "The Beginning of English Georgic," *Renaissance Genres*, Barbara Lewalski, ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), and David Fairer, "Persistence, Adaptations and Transformations in Pastoral and

pastoral to rustic, marked by a turn away from the shepherd to embrace the peasant as symbol of French identity, and shaped by seventeenth-century debates about verisimilitude in art and literature. In the discussion of early modern pastoral as a transitional literary mode, as in the discussion of *L'Astrée* as a bridge between old and new forms of writing and being, something important gets lost. What goes unexplored, what I shall investigate in this dissertation, is what happens at the place where these two forms come together. Connecting the decline of idyllic representations of the natural world to the rise of social realism reinforces the perceived disconnect between the pastoral and the political. In contrast, in the pastoral texts that I discuss, I argue that the two ways of writing about nature represented by the eclogue and the georgic each remain in tact, though altered by their contact. The contact between eclogue and georgic crosses genres, actors and practices, subverting literary and societal norms. Between *L'Astrée* at the beginning of the seventeenth century, and Rousseau's *Julie* in the second half of the eighteenth century, there is not a progression towards a more authentic, more georgic representation of life in nature. Rather, the place of early modern pastoral emerges out of the tension between an idyllic image of pastoral nature typical of the eclogue, and the image of work in nature and the workings of nature found in the georgic.

This dissertation will focus on the subversive potential of pastoral imagery, but it is important to mention that the pastoral also functions in the early modern period as political propaganda for those in power. D'Urfé opens *L'Astrée* with a royal dedication to Henri IV that traces the historical connection between the humble shepherd and the noble

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Georgic Poetry," *The Cambridge History of English Literature 1660-1780* Vol. 1, John Richetti, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

sovereign: “Ces Bergers oyans raconter tant de merveilles de vostre grandeur n’eussent jamais eu la hardiesse de se présenter devant Vostre Majesté, si je ne les eusse asseurez que ces grands Roys, dont l’antiquité se vante le plus, ont esté Pasteurs, qui ont porté la houlette et le Sceptre d’une mesme main” (3). As Nicole Ferrier-Caverivière has discussed, Louis XIV was also represented as the shepherd king in literature, paintings and tapestries.<sup>9</sup> Writing about projects for the creation of royal tapestries in 1667, André Félibien declares that the shepherd’s staff, “qui n’a que deux usages, l’un de conduire le troupeau et l’autre de le garder contre les loups, [...] est le veritable symbole d’un bon Prince tel que Sa Majesté” (22).<sup>10</sup> Evoking the pastoral tension between the political and the literary, and also between labor and leisure, Bernard Beugnot describes how Louis XIV’s adoption of the pastoral identity “met paradoxalement en symbiose le discours de la retraite et de la politique, rêve d’un univers réconcilié qui abolit ou masque tensions et fractures de la société réelle” (119). The balance between pastoral leisure and political labor is also evoked when Louis XIV plays the role of a shepherd in Benserade’s *Ballet royal des Muses* in 1666: “Ce berger n’est jamais sans quelque chose à faire / Et jamais rien de bas n’occupe son loisir / Soit plaisir, soit affaire / Mais l’affaire toujours va devant le plaisir” (Fourth *entrée*). Louis XIV’s appropriation of pastoral imagery masks

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<sup>9</sup> See *L’Image de Louis XIV dans la littérature française de 1660 à 1715* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1981).

<sup>10</sup> Félibien published *Les quatre éléments peints par M. Le Brun et mis en tapisseries pour Sa Majesté* (Paris: P. Le Petit, 1667) while serving as *Historiographe des bâtiments du Roy*.

and naturalizes his political machinations.<sup>11</sup> In contrast, the authors discussed in this dissertation use the pastoral to expose and work with the disjunction between literary and lived nature. My aim in this study of certain pastoral texts is to analyze this disjunction that lies at the heart of the production and consumption of pastoral texts in the early modern period.

The passage from Rousseau's *Confessions* that opens this chapter is one story of what can emerge from this disjunction. It demonstrates how the pastoral is located, as Gerard Genette writes in his famous essay on *L'Astrée*, at the point of tension between "un paysage vécu" and "un lieu symbolique et privilégié [...] un véritable Eden pastoral" (10). The idyllic landscape of d'Urfé's novel fosters Rousseau's desire to visit the region of France where the novel takes place. Because d'Urfé locates his pastoral arcadia in his native Forez along the Lignon River near Lyon, Rousseau imagines that he might be able to travel to this literary paradise.<sup>12</sup> However, his romanticized idea of the landscape of the Forez is shattered when he learns that the region is inhabited by industrious ironworkers rather than amorous shepherds. The traces of human labor on the landscape disturb the conventionally 'pure,' unchanging nature of pastoral literature. One reading of this passage is that it provides the perfect example of how pastoral literature can mask the reality of the people and places it represents. This is the meaning ascribed to this passage

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<sup>11</sup> On this point, which will be discussed in greater detail in chapter one, see Chandra Mukerji, *Territorial Ambitions and the Gardens of Versailles* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>12</sup> Genette identifies geographic specificity as a defining feature that sets this pastoral novel apart from pastoral convention: "de cette familiarité naissent quelques paysages dont la précision et le naturel tranchent sur les conventions de l'arcadisme traditionnel" ("Le Serpent dans la Bergerie" 10).

by a recent socio-geographic study of the Forez region; it figures the power of the literary imaginary to suppress the often difficult material realities of everyday life. According to French geographer François Tomas, this passage demonstrates how *L'Astrée's* idyllic vision of the landscape around the Lignon River “était fort loin de correspondre à la réalité sociale et économique telle qu'elle se présentait et évoluait sur le terrain” (30). If Rousseau had ventured into the Forez, if his conversation with a local woman had not put an end to his quest to follow in the footsteps of the novel's characters, he would have discovered a landscape that did not support the kind of careless leisure enjoyed by d'Urfé's fictional shepherds: “Même s'il avait poussé jusque dans la plaine, il n'aurait trouvé qu'un mauvais pays où la paysannerie souffrait” (30). The disjunction between pastoral fiction and the material reality of the people living in rural poverty is part of what makes pastoral a dangerous label, the mark of a literature that tells lies and traffics in traps.

One of the most well-known studies to expose the dangerous consequences of this disjunction is Marxist literary critic Raymond Williams' *The Country and the City* (1973). The book opens with an anecdote that mirrors Rousseau's encounter with the 'real' nature of the Forez. Williams explains that his study was in part provoked by the difference between his own experience growing up in a rural village and what he heard and read about country life after his arrival at Cambridge. Williams points to the power of pastoral to absorb and obscure the socio-economic realities of actual rural life. It is labor in particular that disappears in pastoralized visions of the countryside, as Williams points out in the case of seventeenth-century English country-house poems. In order to recreate



the English countryside as Eden, the “curse of labor” must be removed from view by making workers invisible:

this magical extraction of the curse of labour is in fact achieved by a simple extraction of the existence of labourers. The actual men and women who rear the animals and drive them to the house and kill them [...] who plant and manure and prune and harvest the fruit trees: they are not present; their work is all done for them by a natural order. (32)

Williams exposes how pastoral can function as a means of escaping the troubles of the present through nostalgia for an imaginary golden age of tranquil unchanging nature: “An idealisation, based on a temporary situation and on a deep desire for stability, served to evade the actual and bitter contradictions of the time” (45). This golden age is “a myth functioning as a memory,” a conservative force that idealizes a rural lifestyle that is mistakenly connected to a simpler, more ‘natural’ point in history (43).

If we assume that idyllic, untouched nature is a defining characteristic of pastoral, then it appears to be a literary mode that is ill-equipped to tell the story of present-day relationships between humans and the natural world. However, in the course of this dissertation, I redefine the pastoral as a mode that creates dialogue between the literary and the political. Literary nature is not always revealed to be an illusion upon contact with ‘real’ nature, nor does lived experience necessarily provide a more valid ‘truth’ of nature than literature. Rather, we shall see how these two ways of knowing nature are mutually informative. If Rousseau’s encounter with the eighteenth-century reality of the Forez reveals it to be a very different place from the one described in d’Urfé’s pastoral

novel, there is also significant evidence of how *L'Astrée* has shaped the twenty-first century Forez in interesting ways. Tomas describes how the contemporary landscape of the Forez has been transformed in the image of d'Urfé's novel, creating a place where natural and cultural products are indistinguishable: "le produit d'une rêve, d'une construction culturelle qui attendit trois siècles avant de devenir une réalité géographique" (30). Where the textual environment meets the lived landscape of the Forez, we can see how literature intervenes in the everyday, and how the early modern literary imaginary is still at work, informing the way we relate to each other and to our environment. A brief discussion of some recent approaches to *L'Astrée* demonstrate how this text continues to inform conceptions of the Forez region, and serves as entry point into a discussion of how nature created in the literary imaginary informs, and is informed by, nature as it is conceived by everyday experience.

### ***L'Astrée* in the Twenty-First Century: On Land, Online and on Screen**

*L'Astrée*, along with the pastoral literary mode in general, has enjoyed a great deal of critical attention in recent years. In an effort to increase the accessibility of a novel whose length, complexity, and form make it seem unreadable to contemporary audiences, two separate projects, one at the Sorbonne under the direction of seventeenth-century scholar Delphine Denis, and one at Tufts University directed by Professor Eglal Henein, have worked to create online critical editions of the text.<sup>13</sup> In addition to work on

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<sup>13</sup> Delphine Denis' "Le Règne d'Astrée" project can be found at [www.astree.paris-sorbonne.fr](http://www.astree.paris-sorbonne.fr), and Eglal Henein's site, "Deux Visages de *L'Astrée*," is at <http://astree.tufts.edu>. On the site for "Le Règne d'*Astrée*," readers can access online

the publication of new online and print critical editions the novel, Delphine Denis' project, "Le Règne d'Astrée," has included a series of international conferences on d'Urfé's text. Two conferences in this series have taken place in the Forez region, at a site that figures in the novel as the home of one of the characters, the druid Adamas. Talks held at what is now the Centre culturel du château de Goutelas ("au coeur de l'Arcadie" according to the center's website) highlighted the important relationship between literary and geographic place in *L'Astrée*. Delphine Denis spoke about how the particular 'placeness' of the novel meant that both knowledge of the text and knowledge of the Forez landscape had to be combined in her critical edition:

*L'Astrée* ne se situe pas dans un espace imaginaire, mais dans un lieu référentiel très précis, le Forez. C'est d'ailleurs pourquoi le travail d'édition critique menée par notre équipe nous oblige un travail de documentation et de référencement très précis de cet espace géographique. Quant aux 'Chemins de *L'Astrée*' qui parcourent le territoire du Forez, ils croisent aussi les trajets des bergers du roman ("*L'Astrée* et le Modèle Arcadien" 16).<sup>14</sup>

Denis' mention of the "chemins de *L'Astrée*" refers to four *Astrée*-themed walking trails that allow visitors to follow in the footsteps of the novel's characters. The geographical specificity of d'Urfé's pastoral paradise is now used to market the region to tourists.

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versions of the first two parts of the novel, as well as critical bibliographies, information on literary texts influenced by *L'Astrée*, and visual art and music connected to *L'Astrée*. On the "Deux Visages de *L'Astrée*" website, online editions of the first two parts are available, as well as numerous resources in French and English, and photos of the Forez region that correspond to various passage from the novel.

<sup>14</sup> From the conference proceedings of *L'Astrée et la Tradition Arcadienne: une Rencontre en Forez*, October 2-3 2009. Web. [http://www.astree.paris-sorbonne.fr/documents/rencontres\\_forez](http://www.astree.paris-sorbonne.fr/documents/rencontres_forez).

Filmmaker Eric Rohmer threatened this business when, in 2007, he brought seventeenth-century pastoral to twenty-first century audiences in what was to be his final film, *Les Amours d'Astrée et de Céladon*. The film provoked outrage amongst members of the Centre culturel du Goutelas and their fellow *Foréziens*. It would seem that upon visiting the Forez region in preparation for filming, Rohmer, like Rousseau before him, experienced a disjunction between the textual environment of d'Urfé's novel and the contemporary landscape. Instead of 'pure' nature, he saw a landscape degraded by human industry. The film opens with a message from Rohmer about a difficult decision he made during production in order to remain faithful to d'Urfé's text. In this message, and in the letters and lawsuits that were sparked by its words, we can see how early modern pastoral speaks to contemporary attempts to understand and represent nature.

In order to fit d'Urfé's multi-volume work into a feature-length film, Rohmer cut out numerous plot lines involving various characters that populate the idyllic pastoral realm of the novel, leaving only the principal love story between the shepherdess Astrée and the shepherd Céladon. Despite Rohmer's major modification of the plot, experts generally agree that his film remains faithful to the text.<sup>15</sup> His modification of the novel's setting, however, was the subject of considerable debate. In the message that precedes the film, Rohmer announces his choice to change the physical location from the Lignon River in the Forez region to the Sioule River in Auvergne. According to Rohmer, the

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<sup>15</sup> In fact there are very few published scholarly opinions on the film, but for one example see Tony Gheeraert, "Les Amours d'Astrée et Céladon. Film d'Éric Rohmer," *Études Épistémè* 12 (2007) <http://www.etudes-episteme.org/2e/!/les-amours-d-astree-et-de-celadon>. There was no formal discussion of the film at the 2007 "Éditer *L'Astrée*" conference, but it was generally well-received by those in attendance. Eglal Henein's site features links to film reviews.

Forez had been subject to such environmental degradation that it was no longer a plausible site for Arcadia:

Malheureusement, nous n'avons pas pu situer cette histoire dans la région où l'avait placée l'auteur; la plaine du Forez étant maintenant défigurée par l'urbanisation, l'élargissement des routes, le rétrécissement des rivières, la plantation des résineux. Nous avons dû choisir ailleurs en France comme cadre de cette histoire, des paysages ayant conservé l'essentiel de leur poésie sauvage et de leur charme bucolique.

For many modern inhabitants of the Forez region, Rohmer's disregard for the geographic specificity of d'Urfé's pastoral paradise constituted a serious infidelity to the novel, turning it into what displeased representatives of the Centre culturel de Goutelas called "une fable de nulle part [...] en évinçant délibérément le pays qui inspira *l'Astrée*, Rohmer a trahi d'Urfé."<sup>16</sup> Residents of the area were spurred into action by what they felt to be an incorrect and offensive characterization of the local environment. The Conseil général de la Loire filed an ultimately unsuccessful lawsuit against the film's production company, charging defamation and demanding the suppression of the opening message. While the *Foréziens* fought for the acknowledgement of the specificity of the landscape represented in d'Urfé's text, Rohmer argued that filming in a pristine natural setting allowed him to be more faithful to the pastoral spirit of the novel. According to Rohmer, it is the very universality of pastoral nature that made *L'Astrée* more easily

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<sup>16</sup> This quotation is part of a letter from Centre culturel du Goutelas president Marc Delacroix and vice-president Marie-Claude Mioche to Eric Rohmer, reprinted in Nicole Vulser, "Le Conseil générale de la Loire attaque le cineaste Eric Rohmer," *Le Monde* 23 September 2007.

communicable to a visual medium than a novel in a more realist style would have been. Pastoral nature functions as a blank slate on which he is free to write his own idyll, as he explains in a 2007 interview with *Le Figaro*:

*L'Astrée* est un roman pastoral, par conséquent situé dans la nature, mais il ne comporte aucune description du paysage. À cette époque, la littérature ne parlait pas de la nature, comme si elle laissait ce sujet aux peintres. C'est une chance pour moi, car cela permet d'ajouter au roman une dimension qu'il n'a pas. Je n'aurais jamais pu filmer un roman de Balzac parce que ses descriptions sont déjà une mise en scène extrêmement précise. Alors que *L'Astrée* laisse un espace à inventer.<sup>17</sup>

In this dissertation, I will unpack some of the assumptions about the nature of early modern pastoral contained in Rohmer's vision for his film. Rohmer's opening message to the film employs the same narrative that undergirds much environmentalist thought; premodern nature was pristine and perfect, and everything has gone downhill since the enlightenment. Thus, the goal of ecologically-minded people should be to go backwards, or to hang on tightly to the rare places that are still "sauvage," or free of the traces of human or cultural intervention. This kind of discourse that casts nature as a conservative, regressive force, has contributed to a misreading of pastoral literature. Writing about nature has come to be associated with a critique of modernity and a desire to return to a more primitive state. Rohmer's message also represents a dualistic understanding of nature and culture, and between pure nature and corrupt culture sits human labor. The

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<sup>17</sup> Marie-Noëlle Tranchant, "Eric Rohmer pour réenchanter le monde," *Le Figaro* 4 September 2007.

marks of human cultivation that the Forez region now bears disqualify it as a believable Arcadia. In contrast to Rohmer, who shuts down the disjunction between the literary nature of *L'Astrée* and the lived nature of the twenty-first century Forez region by simply relocating his project, all of the texts that I consider in my dissertation work in this disjunction between lived and literary nature; they foreground this disjunction, eroding the boundaries between nature and culture, and in the process they break down associated dualisms of feminine and masculine, literary and scientific, imaginary and real. And the intellectual and physical labor of humans, which seems to negate the pastoral for Rohmer, actually contributes to and enriches the post-pastoral nature of these texts.

My dissertation also challenges the widely-held view expressed by Rohmer in his interview with *Le Figaro*, that early modern pastoral literature actually has nothing to do with nature. The controversy that emerged over the place of *L'Astrée*, at the point of contact between d'Urfé's Forez and the lives of contemporary *Foréziens*, belies this assumption. It demonstrates how pastoral literature from this period engages with nature in ways that put it into dialogue with contemporary discourses of environmentalism.

### **Ecocriticism and the Pastoral**

In her introduction to the *Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), Cheryll Glotfelty provides a basic definition of the field of ecocriticism:

the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production

and economic class to its readings of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies. (xviii)

The vast majority of studies of the relationship between literature and the environment have thus far taken American, British, and Australian literature as their primary focus, and ecocritical readings have been rooted in the particular environmental histories of those countries. The field's main professional organization, the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE), began in the United States and now has nine branches in Canada, Europe, Australia and Asia.<sup>18</sup> As the field of ecocriticism has begun to expand its scope beyond Anglophone literature, it has also moved beyond its initial focus on more contemporary literature to consider early modern, renaissance and medieval texts.<sup>19</sup> One important consequence of ecocriticism's exploration of early modern texts has been to complicate environmentalist narratives that paint an idyllic picture of pre-Enlightenment human-nature relations. This notion of an ideal pre-modern nature is advanced in one of the founding works of feminist environmental criticism, a branch of ecocritical thought that investigates the ways in which the oppression of

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<sup>18</sup> See the ASLE website at <http://www.asle.org>. ASLE publishes the quarterly journal *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment* in conjunction with Oxford University Press.

<sup>19</sup> For some examples of recent ecocritical ventures into the (primarily British) early modern see *Early Modern Ecostudies: From the Florentine Codex to Shakespeare*, Thomas Hallock, Ivo Kamps, and Karen L. Raber, eds. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), Robert N. Watson, *The Green and the Real in the Late Renaissance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), Gabriel Egan, *Green Shakespeare: From Ecopolitics to Ecocriticism* (New York: Routledge, 2006). Recent works in the associated field of animal studies include Erica Fudge, *Brutal Reasoning: Animals, Rationality and Humanity in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), and *Perceiving Animals: Humans and Beasts in Early Modern English Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).



women and the exploitation of nature are connected. In *The Death of Nature* (1980), Carolyn Merchant traces the ‘unraveling’ of the organic connection between the human world and the non-human world back to the early modern period. She argues that the philosophies of Descartes and Bacon supplanted a worldview that made no distinction between humans and nature, or between mind and body, with the view that humans could master nature. While the history of the western construction of nature as feminine can be traced back to ancient philosophy, according to Merchant it was only during the early modern period that the connection to nature began to have negative consequences for women. Prior to the scientific revolution, the image of nature as a virgin or as a benevolent, nurturing mother imposed limits on human exploitation of natural resources, encouraging humans to think of themselves as connected to nature. She cites passages from Ovid and Pliny deploring activities such as mining to demonstrate how nature was seen as a living being, one due a certain amount respect (3). With the advent of a more “mechanistic” worldview, nature was reduced to the status of “a female to be controlled and dissected through experiment” (189). Like Merchant, Susan Bordo accords particular significance to the early modern period, when a shift was witnessed away from the concept of an organic female universe. In her reading of Descartes’ *Meditations*, Bordo describes the masculinization of science -- the insistence on rationality and objectivity over sentiment and subjectivity -- as a kind of “separation anxiety” (5). According to Bordo’s reading, Descartes’ framing of science as a masculine pursuit represents an “aggressive intellectual ‘flight from the feminine’ into the modern scientific universe of purity, clarity, and objectivity” (5). In Descartes’ division between the mind and body,

the mind becomes masculine, while the body becomes a feminine object that thought transcends.<sup>20</sup> However, the view of the scientific revolution in the work of scholars such as Merchant and Bordo has been complicated by both historians of science and ecofeminists. While historians of science such as Steven Shapin have shown that the scientific revolution cannot be understood as a unified movement towards human domination of nature, ecofeminists such as Val Plumwood have demonstrated that pre-modern conceptions of the woman-nature connection should not be idealized.<sup>21</sup>

For ecofeminist Val Plumwood, Merchant and Bordo's positing of a pre-Cartesian valuing of the feminine or the natural causes more problems than it solves. She finds it unhelpful for feminists or ecofeminists to strive for the return of a lost organic relationship between humans and the natural environment. She argues that the construction of reason and culture as oppositional to nature and women goes much further back than the early modern period, as evidenced in the writings of Plato (*Mastery of Nature* 75). Plumwood presents the devaluing of women and nature as the result of a series of related dualisms. Permeating Western thinking, these dualisms emerge from and undergird an understanding of culture as separate from and superior to nature. Among the

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<sup>20</sup> Erica Harth has complicated the idea that the gendered mind/body split excluded women from philosophical discourse in her discussion of early modern women's engagement with Cartesian theory. See *Cartesian Women: Versions and Subversions of Rational Discourse in the Old Regime* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992).

<sup>21</sup> See Steven Shapin, *The Scientific Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), and J.B. Shank, "Neither Natural Philosophy, Nor Science, Nor Literature-- Gender, Writing and the Pursuit of Nature in Fontenelle's *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes inhabités*," in *Men, Women, and the Birthing of Modern Science*, Judith P. Zinsler, ed. (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005) 86-110, and Margaret J. Osler's chapter in the same book, "The Gender of Nature and the Nature of Gender in Early Modern Natural Philosophy" 70-85.

oppositional pairs Plumwood sees as deriving from the culture/nature dualism are reason/nature, human/nature, male/female, mind/body(nature), master/slave, reason/matter (physicality), production/reproduction, public/private, and subject/object (43). The hierarchical relationship between these elements is maintained through “backgrounding,” which is the denial of interdependency between culture and nature, and the relegating of the natural to the status of backdrop or setting for cultural achievement (21). Another tool that enables dualistic thinking according to Plumwood is the insistence on differences and the denial of any possible shared characteristics: “The master tries to magnify, to emphasize and to maximize the number and importance of differences and to eliminate or treat as inessential shared qualities [...] eliminating possible confusion between the powerful and the powerless” (49). Plumwood and other ecofeminists insist on the need to move beyond dualistic thinking in order to reestablish the value of the natural and the feminine.

Across multiple disciplines, feminist theory has shown how the devaluing of women can be linked directly to their historical association with nature, in forms ranging from a flower to fields, to the earth in its entirety. In light of the negative consequences that the association with nature has had for women, many feminist scholars dissociate women from the natural as a means of liberation. Ecofeminists have resisted this dissociation, insisting on a strategy that allows for the revaluing of both nature and women. Plumwood writes: “Women cannot base their own freedom on endorsing the continued lowly status of the sphere of nature with which they have been identified and from which they have lately risen” (23). Taking Bordo’s concept of the Cartesian “flight

from the feminine” a step further, ecocritic Stacy Alaimo has identified a “flight from nature” in the work of feminists from Mary Wollstonecraft to Simone de Beauvoir and Monique Wittig (13). Alaimo and Plumwood argue that asserting the place of women in the cultural sphere does not go far enough in resolving the oppressive women-nature association. Echoing ecofeminists’ calls to redefine nature and culture instead of working within the existing dualism, Alaimo takes issue with any figuring of women’s equality that maintains the hierarchical opposition between the natural and the cultural:

Given that ‘woman’ has been defined in much of Western thought as that which is mired in ‘nature,’ it is no wonder that feminist theory has struggled to extricate her from this quicksand. By attempting to disentangle ‘woman’ from the web of associations that bind her to nature however, nature is kept at bay -- repelled -- rather than redefined. (4)

Taking up the challenge set forth by scholars like Alaimo, ecofeminists have laid out a series of strategies to move beyond the nature/culture dualism by destabilizing the categories of nature and culture. They argue that by challenging conventional ideas about nature as inferior to culture, as an unchanging object of present-day nostalgia, we can also challenge myths about women that are founded on their connection to this devalued nature. As feminist Diana Fuss writes, “It might be necessary to begin questioning the constructionist assumption that nature and fixity go together (naturally) just as sociality and change go together (naturally)” (6). Another important step is breaking down gender dualisms by recognizing that neither men nor women have a designated place in culture or nature, and that these categories are unstable (Plumwood 35). This breaking down of

dualisms can be accomplished in part by foregrounding all that is silenced by dualistic thinking, including women's achievements and the subjectivity of the natural world: "a non hierarchical concept of difference requires a move to systems of thought, accounting, perception, decision-making, which recognize the contribution of what has been backgrounded, and which acknowledge dependency" (60). In order to understand the pastoral properly, we must move beyond a dualistic understanding of nature and culture, and beyond environmentalist narratives that idealize a pre-modern nature to which contemporary society should return. In all of the texts that I will discuss, pastoral is a resolutely forward-looking mode, a working model that presents alternatives to existing gender and social hierarchies.

Because pastoral has been debilitated by its reputation as a backward-looking mode out of touch with the political world, numerous critics and ecocritics have attempted to qualify and recuperate the term in order to demonstrate how it remains a useful concept in contemporary environmental discourse. In his classic study of American pastoral, *The Machine in the Garden* (1964), Leo Marx attempts to salvage the pastoral by sifting the valuable "complex" pastoral texts from the excessive numbers of "sentimental" pastorals. While sentimental pastoral texts escape into idealized nature, complex pastorals "manage to qualify, or call into question, or bring irony to bear against the illusion of peace in a green pasture" (24). In this way complex pastoral goes beyond "the confines of a decadent convention" (74). More recently, in his important study *What is Pastoral?*, Paul Alpers has sought to undo some of the damage done to the concept of pastoral by the "ungoverned inclusiveness" with which modern studies use the term. The

extremely flexible, inclusive definition of pastoral that characterizes much contemporary use of the term can be traced back to William Empson's iconic work *Some Versions of Pastoral* (1935), which famously defines the pastoral as "the process of putting the complex into the simple" (23). By presenting a more rigorous definition of the pastoral, Alpers complicates the blanket characterization of all pastoral as the bastion of "naive idyllicism" (ix). Arguing that previous theories have exaggerated the importance of rural settings as the defining feature of pastoral, Alpers shifts the focus to the humans that traditionally populate pastoral literature. Appropriating Kenneth Burke's concept of the representative anecdote, Alpers argues that "what connects pastoral works to each other, what makes them a literary 'kind,' is the way each deals, in its circumstances or for its reasons, with the representative anecdote of herdsmen and their lives" (26). Thus, landscapes are not pastoral because of any inherent bucolic characteristics they possess; rather, "we may say that landscapes are pastoral when they are conceived as fit habitations for herdsmen or their equivalents" (28). For Alpers, the usefulness of the pastoral mode lies in the representative potential of the figure of the shepherd/herdsman/farmer. These figures serve as an effective means to represent the limits and possibilities of human strength relative to nature. An important task in the rehabilitation of the pastoral as Alpers sees it is getting rid of its reputation as a "merely" scenic mode that suppresses the voices of the rural figures it represents ("Philoctetes" 29).

Responding to critics such as Alpers and Patterson, whose approach to pastoral as an allegory for human concerns "unabashedly marginalizes the environment," ecocritic

Ken Hiltner has argued that pastoral should be read first and foremost as a form of nature writing (2). Hiltner's work is representative of what Lawrence Buell, one of the foremost environmental literary critics, describes as an "ecocentric repossession of pastoral" gathering force in ecocritical discourse, marking a "shift from representation of nature as a theater for human events to representation in the sense of advocacy of nature as a presence for its own sake" (*Environmental Imagination* 52). In *What Else is Pastoral?* (2011), Hiltner refutes the notion that pastoral is an allegorical mode that has more to do with human culture and politics than the countryside. In his study of English Renaissance literature, he shows how pastoral works of this period demonstrate environmental consciousness and concern about the consequences of urbanization on traditionally agricultural societies.

Each of these attempts to redeem the pastoral as a relevant, useful literary mode relies on a dualistic understanding of nature and culture. As a consequence of this reliance, those aspects of pastoral writing that are associated with culture – the masculine/human/historical -- take on more value than those associated with nature – the feminine/nonhuman/literary. In Leo Marx's opposition of complex and sentimental, the masculine-coded 'realistic' mode of representation is valued over the feminized, emotional, "shallow conception of reality inherent in our sentimental pastoralism" (7). While complex pastoral comes out of "high culture," sentimental pastoral is a product of popular culture, where it is "the starting point for infantile wish-fulfillment dreams, a diffuse nostalgia, and a naive, anarchic primitivism" (10). In Alpers' attempt to redeem pastoral by emphasizing its function as a platform for human concerns and downplaying

its natural setting, he also bases his valuing of the pastoral on the nature/culture dualism. To demonstrate the relevance of this literary mode, he disconnects it from an undervalued nature. Although Hiltner attempts to correct for the undervaluing of nature through his focus on the environment in pastoral texts, he does not manage to get away from Marx's complex/sentimental dichotomy, or Alpers' political/scenic dichotomy. What we should value in early modern pastoral, according to Hiltner, is its realistic description of, or "gesturing" towards, historical environmental problems. His argument is based on the idea that nature can somehow be separated from culture, and that literary imaginings of nature are useful through their capacity to mimic 'real' nature. While all of these critics have contributed to the reading of pastoral that I propose in this dissertation, I will show how we can get beyond an appreciation of pastoral based on its capacity to represent the 'cultural' human world, or the 'natural' environment. Instead, we can see how pastoral texts break down the distinction between these two spheres.

We have seen how gender is bound up in the notions of nature and culture. In my discussions of pastoral, I will also consider how this dualism has been mapped onto the disciplinary relationship between the humanities and the sciences. One of the principal critiques against environmental literary criticism is its superficial engagement with science, in particular with ecological science. Thus far, there has been no real response to this critique on the part of literary ecocritics, except to acknowledge that a more rigorous scientific education should be a part of their training.<sup>22</sup> There has been little discussion of

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<sup>22</sup> For a useful overview of the history of ecocriticism and its engagement with ecological science, see Ursula K. Heise, "The Hitchhiker's Guide to Ecocriticism," *PMLA* 121.2 (2006): 503-516. See also Glen A. Love, *Practical Ecocriticism: Literature, Biology and*



how the humanities might contribute to the interdisciplinary study of nature, other than by attempting to mimic scientific approaches more closely.

American literature scholar Dana Phillips is one of the most vocal critics of environmental literary criticism. He is disturbed by the trend amongst many ecocritics to embrace more scientific representations of nature in literature. According to Phillips, ecocriticism's attempt to cross disciplinary boundaries often amounts to no more than an abuse of metaphors:

Ecocritical analysis of literary texts then proceeds haphazardly, by means of fuzzy concepts fashioned out of borrowed terms: words like "ecosystem," "organism," and "wilderness" are used metaphorically, with no acknowledgment of their metaphorical status, as if literary, ecological, and environmental ways of speaking were a lot more compatible than they are, and as if their differences could safely be overlooked (579).<sup>23</sup>

Like Phillips, ecocritic Greg Garrard calls for a more responsible application of ecological concepts in literary theory, especially "in light of developments in ecology that expose the rhetoric of balance and harmony as, in effect, versions of pastoral" (178).

While previous understandings of ecological systems may have lent themselves well to conventional pastoral depictions of a stable orderly nature, ecologist Joel Hagen writes

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*the Environment* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), and Karl Kroeber, *Ecological Literary Criticism: Romantic Imagining and the Biology of Mind* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

<sup>23</sup> See Dana Phillips, "Ecocriticism, Literary Theory and the Truth of Ecology," *New Literary History* 30.3 (Summer 1999): 577-602, and *The Truth of Ecology: Nature, Culture and Literature in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) especially 42-82.

that “new ecology emphasizes indeterminism, instability, and constant change” (194).<sup>24</sup>

For ecocriticism to avoid the traps of over-simplifying and idealizing ecological concepts, or dead-ending in a celebration of mimetic realism in representations of nature in literature, Phillips suggests that it needs to be “more imaginatively engaged with the earth as it is” (39).

The most useful theory of pastoral can accommodate current ideas of ecological science without discounting the value of imagined nature. It allows for the combined presence of a more conventional, idyllic nature of the eclogue tradition with the working nature of the georgic, and recognizes the connection between our understandings of gender and of the nature/culture relationship.

### **The Post-Pastoral**

Contemporary authors, artists and critics have adopted the term “postmodern pastoral” to describe art and literature that grapples with the relationship between humans and nature in an era of ecological crisis.<sup>25</sup> While this term does not mean exactly the

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<sup>24</sup> See Joel Hagen, *An Entangled Bank: The Origins of Ecosystem Ecology* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992). For a similar account of shifting paradigms in ecological science’s representation of nature, see environmental historian Donald Worster, “Nature and the Disorder of History,” in *Reinventing Nature?: Responses to Postmodern Deconstruction*, Michael Soulé and Gary Lease, eds. (Washington D.C.: Island Press, 1995) 65-86.

<sup>25</sup> See for example Gretchen Legler, *Toward a Postmodern Pastoral: Contemporary Women Writers’ Revisions of the Natural World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), Dana Phillips, “Don DeLillo’s Postmodern Pastoral,” in *Reading the Earth: New Directions in the Study of Literature and the Environment*, Michael P. Branch et al eds. (Moscow: University of Idaho Press, 1998) 235-246, Scott Hess, “Postmodern Pastoral, Advertising, and the Masque of Technology,” *Interdisciplinary Studies of Literature and the Environment* 11.1 (2004): 71-100, Janet Giltrow and David Stuck,

same thing to all who employ it, it generally points to a need to move beyond “conventional” pastoral in order to respond to the realities of contemporary life. Turning away from what is perceived as the objectification or exploitation of the non-human world in traditional pastoral literature and nature writing, postmodern pastoral texts experiment with ways to give nature a voice. Postmodern pastoral considers urban nature, and the disappearing boundary between urban and rural spaces. Ecofeminist Gretchen Legler defines postmodern pastoral as “a posthumanist construction of human relationships with nature that makes more sense in a postmodern world; a vision that is informed by ecological and feminist theories, and one that images human/nature relationships as ‘conversations’ between knowing subjects” (229). While postmodern pastoral has temporal connotations and is more concerned with treating contemporary literature, English scholar Terry Gifford’s theory of the post-pastoral invokes the term “post” in a conceptual way. Gifford’s conceptual understanding of ‘post’ makes it a useful tool for exploring how some early modern pastoral gets beyond the traps of conventional pastoral.

Gifford uses the term post-pastoral to describe pastoral texts that defy the stereotypes associated with this literary mode: “What is needed is a new term to refer to literature that is aware of the anti-pastoral and of the conventional illusions upon which Arcadia is premised, but which finds a language to outflank those dangers with a vision of accommodated humans, at home in the very world they thought themselves alienated

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“‘Mute Dialogues’: Michael Ondaatje’s *Running in the Family* and the Language of Postmodern Pastoral,” in *Postmodern Fiction in Canada*, Bertens Hans, ed. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1992) 161-179.

from by their possession of language” (149). Gifford identifies six fundamental aspects of the post-pastoral, which build on ecocritical and ecofeminist theory (a work need not combine all of these characteristics to be considered post-pastoral; rather, the presence of any of these features can identify it as a departure from pastoral convention): 1) Awe in attention to the natural world; 2) The recognition of a creative-destructive universe; 3) The recognition that the inner is also the workings of the outer, that our inner human nature can be understood in relation to external nature; 4) To convey an awareness of both nature as culture and of culture as nature; 5) With consciousness comes conscience: consciousness which for centuries appeared to set us apart from nature could be seen from a biocentric point of view to be the species’ responsibility for its ecological relationships and its ultimate survival; 6) The ecofeminist realization that the exploitation of the planet is of the same mindset as the exploitation of women and minorities.<sup>26</sup> In the following chapters we shall see how the post-pastoral can be premodern. An exploration of the early modern relationship between humans and nature as expressed in literature adds new dimensions to post-pastoral theory. As a theory that asserts that literature can do important work in changing destructive and oppressive social practices, post-pastoral theory can find powerful models in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century texts that put

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<sup>26</sup> See Gifford’s chapter on post-pastoral in *Pastoral* (New York: Routledge, 1999) 146-174. He further elaborates his theory in chapters and articles including “Post-Pastoral as a Tool for Ecocriticism,” in *Pastoral and the Humanities: Arcadia Re-inscribed*. Mathilde Skoie and Sonja Bjornstad-Velásquez, eds. (Exeter: Bristol Phoenix Press, 2006) 14-26, *Reconnecting with John Muir: Essays in Post-Pastoral Practice* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006), “Terrain, character and text: is *Cold Mountain* by Charles Frazier a post-pastoral novel?”, *Mississippi Quarterly* 25 (Winter 2001): 87-96, and “Judith Wright’s Poetry and the Turn to the Post-Pastoral,” *Australian Humanities Review* 48 (May 2010).

pastoral to work creating change. Working within the disjunction between lived and literary nature, the pastoral texts of the three authors that I consider offer a new understanding of how this literary mode functions, and of how early modern literature can intervene in contemporary contexts.

In chapter one, “Women Writing Nature: Montpensier and the Pastoral,” I use the work of Anne-Marie Louise d’Orléans, duchesse de Montpensier (1627-1693), to discuss the pastoral as a feminist resource for women writers. The status of nature writing and the kind of value accorded to female authors writing about nature is bound up in how we define and value the categories of nature and culture. If nature is debased and understood as a dangerous association for women, the work of women writing nature is in turn particularly devalued. As ecofeminist Sylvia Bowerbank notes, “women’s speaking about nature has been depreciated as -- at best -- intuitive” (2). Woman writing pastoral texts are denied agency, and their status as author is erased, subsumed into the realm of natural activities.

I argue that Montpensier’s work demonstrates the subversive potential of this literary mode. Literary and lived nature come together in her texts, which are the product of both the influence of pastoral novels such as *L’Astrée* and her own experience of life in the country during years of exile after participating in the Fronde against her cousin Louis XIV. Critical readings and biographies of Montpensier demonstrate how women writing about nature, in particular women writing in the pastoral mode, have been devalued. Recognizing how Montpensier’s association with nature writing has undermined her importance as a writer and as a historical figure, feminist critics have reappraised her

work, attempting to disassociate her from the romanticized nature of conventional pastoral. In my readings of Montpensier's pastoral writing, I show how nature becomes a powerful resource for women instead of a dangerous association. I attend to the post-pastoral departure from pastoral convention in four of her texts, each representing a different genre. In the first and second sections, I consider Montpensier's account of her life in rural exile in her *Mémoires*, and the fictionalized account of this period in the collection of *nouvelles* co-authored by Jean-Regnault de Segrais, *Les Nouvelles Françaises ou les Divertissements de la Princesse Aurélie* (1659). In a third section I discuss Montpensier's correspondence with Françoise Bertaut de Motteville, in which the two women make plans for a 'pastoral republic' where women would be freed from the obligation to marry and have children. Finally, I read Montpensier's short novel *La Relation de l'Isle Imaginaire* (1659) as an example of her ability to manipulate pastoral convention in order to assert power, in this case over an unruly member of the parliament of the Dombes, a principality in which Montpensier was sovereign.

The incorporation of images of physical and intellectual labor is central to Montpensier's use of pastoral, and it is through labor that nature becomes a feminist space in her texts. By weaving these images into conventionally idyllic natural spaces of the pastoral, I show how these texts reconfigure traditional relationships between women, labor, and nature. They challenge the existence of a 'pure' nature that should be kept free of any traces of human work, as well as the idea of the essentialized 'natural woman' whose proximity to nature dictates her inferiority within patriarchal society. Montpensier

uses the pastoral to create a space in which it becomes feasible, and natural, that a woman builds, writes, and controls her own destiny.

In chapter two, “Fontenelle’s Post-Pastoral Interdisciplinarity: Knowing Nature through Science and Literature,” I consider the work of one of the most important theoreticians and authors of pastoral literature in early-modern Europe, Bernard le Bouvier de Fontenelle (1657-1757). In readings of Fontenelle’s pastoral, I explore the relationship between nature as it exists in the literary imaginary, and as it is known through everyday experience and scientific observation. In his theory, poetry and prose, he creates a ‘modern’ pastoral that engages with events and conditions of his time. His work serves as a perfect example of why we need the term ‘post-pastoral’ to understand the complex ways in which this literary mode has functioned throughout history. Fontenelle’s work also provides a much-needed model for contemporary ecocriticism by staging a mutually informative relationship between literary and scientific ways of knowing the world.

After a discussion of the perceived incompatibility between pastoral and modernity amongst many of Fontenelle’s critics, I turn to an examination of Fontenelle’s pastoral theory in his *Discours sur la Nature de l’Eglogue* (1688). In this text, Fontenelle attempts to free pastoral literature from the constraints of verisimilitude that lead, in his opinion, to the inclusion of vulgar descriptions of rural labor in what should be idyllic spaces. For Fontenelle, it is important to be transparent about how the difficult conditions of actual life in the countryside differ significantly from life in nature as it is imagined by pastoral literature. In my discussion of Fontenelle’s practice of the pastoral in his *Poésies*

*Pastorales* (1688), I show how the disjunction between ‘real’ and literary spaces is mapped onto the distance between the court and the countryside. The characters of Fontenelle’s eclogues travel in this space between the city and the country, and their movement breaks down the dualistic relationship between culture and nature.

Finally I discuss Fontenelle’s *Entretiens sur la Pluralité des Mondes* (1686), a text that brings pastoral literature into conversation with Cartesian cosmology. Over the course of six evenings of conversation in the idyllic garden of a country estate, a philosopher and a noblewoman discuss new scientific theories of the universe and speculate about the possibility of life on other planets. In this modern eclogue, it becomes clear how scientific and literary ways of knowing nature inform each other, as equal partners in a mutually beneficial relationship.

In chapter three, “Rousseau and the Post-Pastoral: Learning to be Natural in *Julie ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* and *Émile ou de l’Éducation*,” I use the notion of the post-pastoral to explore what seems to be a paradox in Rousseau’s work; while texts such as *Julie* (1761) and *Émile* (1762) glorify nature and advocate a pastoral lifestyle, they also use nature to justify women’s inferiority within a patriarchal system. For this reason, many ecocritics have celebrated Rousseau’s respect for nature, while feminist critics have shown how the concept of nature becomes a dangerous tool in the hands of Rousseau, in that it constitutes the basis of women’s exclusion from the political sphere. Bringing ecofeminist theory to bear in my readings of Rousseau, I show how the idea of a stable nature on which hierarchical distinctions between masculine and feminine, and political and domestic spheres could be built is constantly undermined.



After an introduction that gives an overview of feminist and ecocritical readings of Rousseau, the first section of the chapter discusses Rousseau's epistolary novel *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*. In two prefaces, Rousseau frames the work as a model of an ideal natural life that readers should strive to imitate, presenting the female protagonist Julie as an ideal woman, whose natural virtue can serve as an antidote for cultural corruption. The first post-pastoral aspect of Rousseau's work is his notion that natural life and natural identity are accessible through the cultural activities of reading and education. Rousseau sets up this non-oppositional relationship between nature and culture almost in spite of himself, and in spite of his desire to keep these two categories separate. This non-oppositional relationship also destabilizes Rousseau's gender politics. Nature in *Julie* proves to be an unstable foundation on which to construct static masculine or feminine identities. Although she is posited as the ideal natural woman, Julie constantly transgresses the limits prescribed for women by Rousseau's nature.

In section two, I discuss another text framed by Rousseau as a reader's roadmap to a life close to nature, *Émile ou de l'Éducation*. Like *Julie*, this text also presents a model of the ideal natural woman, Sophie. While Sophie figures the feminine subject quite differently from the way Julie does, she also subverts the gender role prescribed by nature. Like Julie, Sophie resists an essentialized feminine identity. I also discuss Rousseau's sequel to *Émile*, *Émile et Sophie ou les Solitaires*, in which the relationship between Émile and Sophie breaks down, ending in separation and Sophie's death. I read this text as evidence of the unsustainability of a patriarchal system based on a gendered nature/culture dualism.

There are many directions that an ecocritical study of early modern pastoral literature could have taken. Pastoral imagery is pervasive in the art and literature of this period, and it is employed in diverse ways. It provokes a contemplation of mortality in Nicolas Poussin's famous painting "Les Bergers d'Arcadie," which I discuss in my conclusion. The pastoral is mocked in anti-pastoral works such as Charles Sorel's *Le Berger Extravagant* (1627), and used to naturalize the authority of Louis XIV in multiple *fêtes* held in the gardens of Versailles. Early modern notions of the pastoral and understandings of the nature/culture relationship also inform colonialist discourse and the representation of the non-European other.<sup>27</sup> From the wide range of pastoral possibilities offered by the early modern imaginary, I have selected works that represent the subversive, forward-looking capacity of pastoral literature. These texts destabilize traditional understandings of the pastoral mode and of the early modern period, demonstrating the existence of a premodern post-pastoral. Early modern pastoral models a mutually informative relationship between lived and literary nature, and ways of articulating how literature can shape our reality. Instead of being located in a long-lost, outdated Arcadia, early modern culture, like pastoral literature, is in dialogue with the present.

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<sup>27</sup> See for example Jill H. Casid *Sowing Empire: Landscape and Colonization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005). Recent studies in the growing field of postcolonial ecocriticism include Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (New York: Routledge, 2010), *Caribbean Literature and the Environment: Between Nature and Culture*, Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey, Renée K. Gosson and George B. Handley, eds. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005), and Robert D. Nixon "Environmentalism and Postcolonialism" in *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*, Ania Loomba et al., eds. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

## Chapter One

### Women Writing Nature: Montpensier and the Pastoral

Ses obsèques, célébrées avec magnificence, furent troublées elles-mêmes par un singulier accident. L'urne qui contenait ses entrailles embaumées, et mal embaumées, éclata en pleine cérémonie avec un bruit épouvantable, et fit sauver tous les assistants. Il était dit qu'un peu de ridicule se mêlerait à tout ce qui serait de Mademoiselle, même à l'article des funérailles.

-- Sainte-Beuve, *Causeries du lundi*

If nature is no longer a repository of stasis and essentialism, no longer the mirror image of culture, then the female body need not be misogyny's best resource.

-- Stacy Alaimo, *Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminist Space*

Both of the above quotations suggest ways in which the fates of nature and women have been connected in literature and history. In Sainte-Beuve's account of the funeral of Anne-Marie-Louise d'Orléans, duchesse de Montpensier, the female body is presented as completely incompatible with culture. The "magnificence" of the stately ceremony is destroyed, turned to ridicule as the smell and sound of Montpensier's remains explode onto the scene. Sainte-Beuve then uses Montpensier's unruly body as grounds to reduce her entire life to ridicule. He suppresses or discounts her accomplishments by emphasizing her connection with the bodily, the irrational, and the

natural.<sup>28</sup> He deems her aberrant, unrepresentative of seventeenth-century cultural ideals: “Ce qui manque à sa vie, à son caractère comme à son esprit, c’est le goût, c’est la grâce, c’est la justesse, ce qui devait précisément marquer la belle époque de Louis XIV” (524).<sup>29</sup> He casts her as disconnected from reality and denies the effectiveness of her participation in the realm of the cultural, implying that her attempts to make change, whether by leading troops in the Fronde or by writing about a pastoral alternative to court culture, were equally unsuccessful. Referring to her correspondence with Françoise Bertaut de Motteville and their plans for a pastoral republic, he concludes that “en tout, ici comme dans la Fronde, c’est le sentiment de la réalité, c’est le bon sens et la justesse qui lui manquent” (518). He then skips over the rest of her written work (“ses diverses compositions et rapsodies littéraires”) to arrive more quickly at what he deems the “grand événement de sa vie,” her failed romantic relationship with M. de Lauzun, the unequal match that she made for herself after refusing many noble suitors proposed by the king.<sup>30</sup> According to Sainte-Beuve, Montpensier narrates her love for Lauzun in her memoirs with “la naïveté d’une bergère” (518). Because Montpensier did not occupy the traditional female roles of wife and mother, Sainte-Beuve concludes that she remained a

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<sup>28</sup> When Sainte-Beuve values women’s writing, it exhibits “natural” qualities that are associated with the feminine. See Faith Beasley, *Salons, History and the Creation of Seventeenth-Century France: Mastering Memory* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2006) 255.

<sup>29</sup> See Joan DeJean’s discussion of how women’s exceptionality is used to defuse the threat they pose to the status quo in *Tender Geographies: Women and the Origins of the Novel in France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991) 26.

<sup>30</sup> For a discussion of how Sainte-Beuve’s treatment of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century authors is shaped by his nineteenth-century politics, see Daniel Brewer, *The Enlightenment Past: Reconstructing Eighteenth-Century French Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008) and Roger Fayolle, *Sainte-Beuve et le XVIIIe siècle; ou, Comment les révolutions arrivent* (Paris: A. Colin, 1972).

child all her life: “Celle qui s’appelait *Mademoiselle* par excellence ne pouvait se décider de cesser de l’être” (506). Sainte-Beuve’s characterization of Montpensier paved the way for similar treatments in later literary histories. Montpensier continues to be treated as almost a fictional character, associated with the unreasonable, the romanesque and the romantic, attributed a naive nature that is constituted as being incompatible with the political.

The second quotation by Stacy Alaimo suggests that unpacking the kind of assumptions present in Sainte-Beuve’s criticism must operate on two fronts: redefining traditional concepts of the natural and the cultural is necessary in order to deal with the devalued status that both women and nature have been accorded in relation to culture. This chapter will consider how women writing about nature -- specifically women writing pastoral literature -- perform such a redefinition. As an author of pastoral literature and as a woman who became familiar with rural life during her time in exile at her country estate of Saint-Fargeau, Montpensier’s biography and bibliography are connected to nature. As we have seen with Sainte-Beuve, and as we shall see in the case of more recent work on Montpensier, this connection is frequently employed to undermine the significance of Montpensier’s work. However, Montpensier’s pastoral work is more subversive than previously supposed. It rewrites limits of genre and gender, subverting conventional narratives that define the cultural sphere through its opposition to a passive, feminized nature.

Most critics and literary historians have focused on Montpensier’s *Mémoires* and her collection of literary portraits, the *Divers Portraits* (1659). These works have been

studied in the context of modes of self-expression in early-modern women's writing that emerged from salon society.<sup>31</sup> Inspired by Scudéry's *Carte de Tendre*, which first appeared in her novel *Clélie Histoire romaine* (1654-60), scholars of the early modern period have discussed the construction of seventeenth-century female subjectivity in terms of geographical metaphors of "inner" nature.<sup>32</sup> Based in the interior space of the salon, women developed a literary identity, charting metaphorical "tender" geographies that asserted their position on the literary and cultural landscape.<sup>33</sup> DeJean describes how women novelists invested the previously uncharted territory of the emotions with meaning and value, attending to the "placeness" of what had been considered a no-man's land<sup>34</sup>: "Their novels were considered to have claimed, each in its own way, new territory

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<sup>31</sup> For a discussion of literary portraits as both a positive and problematic vehicle for the construction female subjectivity in seventeenth-century France see Nina Ekstein "Women's Images Effaced: The Literary Portrait in Seventeenth-Century France," *Women's Studies* 21.1 (1992): 43-57. For an analysis of Montpensier's role in the development of the literary portrait and the *nouvelle*, see Sandra Dijkstra, "La Grande Mademoiselle and the Written Portrait: Feminine Narcissism, Aristocratic Pride, or Literary Innovation?" *Pacific Coast Philology* 13 (1978): 19-28. See also Denise Mayer, "Receuil de portraits littéraires attribués à la Grande Mademoiselle," *Bulletin du bibliophile* (1969-70): 136-74, Lucie Desjardins, "Entre sincérité et artifice. La mise en scène de soi dans le portrait mondain," *Tangence* 77 (2005): 143-155, and Jean Garapon, *La culture d'une princesse: Ecriture et autoportrait dans l'oeuvre de la Grande Mademoiselle (1627-1693)* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2003).

<sup>32</sup> For a study of allegorical cartography in seventeenth-century literature see Jeffrey N. Peters, *Mapping Discord: Allegorical Cartography in Early Modern French Writing* (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 2004).

<sup>33</sup> DeJean employs the term tender geographies to refer to the "persistent connection of private (the romantic) and public (the political)" in the novels of seventeenth-century women (*Tender Geographies* 4).

<sup>34</sup> In the ecocritical context, the notion of "placeness" is elaborated as a means of restoring value to the environment (natural or built) that is often taken for granted as the "background" to life's events. Ecocritic Lawrence Buell writes about the potential for art and literature to accord new value to this undervalued aspect of daily life, to "shake free of the ground condition of place obliviousness," *Writing for an Endangered World*:

for the genre by describing with increased precision the life of the heart and what Scudéry termed the geography of tenderness” (*Tender Geographies* 10). Building on the critical tradition that considers the ways in which women developed literary genres that conquered new territory, I would like to examine how place itself shaped literary creation. In this chapter, I will consider texts that bring metaphorical geography into contact with physical geography of nature. Out of this contact emerges a kind of women’s political activity that can be discussed not just in terms of genre but in terms of place.

Nature, thought in terms of a space that is free from oppressive societal norms, provides a context in which women can elaborate an alternative, “undomesticated” subjectivity (Alaimo).<sup>35</sup> It also allows for an interrogation of the relationship between spheres traditionally coded as masculine and feminine, through such binaries as the cultural and the natural, the public and the private, exterior and interior. If the critical locating of Montpensier in nature (and outside of culture) has masked the significance of her literary and political achievements, we will see that Montpensier’s own pastoral writing recasts nature as a source of power. In the same way, critical literature has located

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*Literature, Culture and the Environment in the U.S. and Beyond* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press): 61. My discussion of placeness is also indebted to Juliette Cherbuliez’s discussion of the importance of place in the production of leisure literature in *The Place of Exile: Leisure Literature and the Limits of Absolutism* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2005).

<sup>35</sup> See Stacy Alaimo, *Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminist Space* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000). Clearly the notion of the “domestic” that Alaimo is working with in her analysis of nineteenth- and twentieth century women writers cannot be unproblematically mapped onto a seventeenth-century context. However, an understanding of the “undomesticated” as a site of resistance to culture and culturally defined gender roles remains useful for my argument.

the pastoral literary mode outside of history, but the pastoral texts I consider in this chapter are not idyllic dreamlands; they attend to the ‘placeness’ of their natural setting. They challenge the idea of nature as a non-place that is sealed off from culture, just as they challenge the idea that a woman’s place is defined by biological nature.

Montpensier was born at the Louvre in 1627 to Marie de Bourbon, duchesse de Montpensier and Gaston d’Orléans, the brother of Louis XIII.<sup>36</sup> When her mother died shortly after her birth, Montpensier inherited her vast territories and sizeable fortune. Her wealth made her a sought-after marriage candidate, and her complete control over her fortune meant that she had the power to refuse any offers that did not appeal to her (DeJean, *Against Marriage* 4). After turning down a number of marriage proposals arranged by her cousin Louis XIV, Montpensier chose her own partner, the duc de Lauzun, captain in the king’s guard. The king initially approved their marriage, but he eventually retracted his approval because Lauzun was so far beneath her in rank. Lauzun was later imprisoned by Louis XIV, and Montpensier gave up much of her land in order to secure his release. The two eventually separated in 1684.

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<sup>36</sup> In his memoirs, Saint-Simon describes how Montpensier came to be known as “Mademoiselle.” He writes that this title originated with Montpensier’s desire to distinguish herself from her half-sisters: “Elle voulut donc une distinction au-dessus d’elles bien que de rang égal, et à l’exemple du nom singulier de Monsieur et de Madame tout court, elle voulut être nommée tout court Mademoiselle.” He adds, like Sainte-Beuve, that “Mademoiselle” was a title that Montpensier never “outgrew,” *Mémoires Complètes et Authentiques du Duc de De Saint-Simon sur le Siècle de Louis XIV et la Régence*, vol. 7 (Paris: A. Sautet et cie, 1829) 167. DeJean takes issue with the continued use of the title *Mademoiselle de* and *Madame de* in critical studies of early-modern women (*Tender Geographies* 2-3). Since male authors from the period are referred to by their last name only, DeJean follows the same practice with female authors.



When Montpensier's story is told by biographers and literary critics, the failed relationship with Lauzun often occupies a great deal of space. The focus on this event has often led to the framing of her life as a disappointment, one that comes to overshadow Montpensier's significant achievements; notably her participation in the Fronde, leading armies and famously taking the city of Orléans. She was also a prolific and versatile author, writing memoirs that have provided important insights into seventeenth-century court life, as well as literary portraits, two short novels, and a collection of novellas in collaboration with her secretary Jean Regnault de Segrais. Despite all of these accomplishments, she is often cast as naive and unworldly, a tragic figure who did not live up to her great potential as one of the most powerful women in the court of Louis XIV. This was the image that Patricia Cholakian encountered upon reading Francis Steegmuller's 1955 biography of Montpensier: "If it was not exactly condescending, it nonetheless seemed to suggest that everything connected with La Grande Mademoiselle bordered on being a joke" (*Women* 9). In more recent work by one of the foremost authorities on Montpensier, Jean Garapon, traces of this condescension remain. In his introduction to the recently published English translation of Montpensier's *Mémoires*, Jean Garapon speculates that her writing can be seen as an attempt to compensate for a failed life:

someone to whom birth and good fortune gave everything she could possibly want -- she was considered the richest marital prize in the whole of Europe -- and yet whose whole life was one of disappointment and failure. Perhaps that was

what interacted with her own reading of other women's memoirs to inspire her to write. (vii)

Critics such as Garapon present Montpensier as an uncritical reader, and as a writer who aspires only to imitation of literary conventions. Garapon describes the literary culture of the novel of seventeenth-century France as providing the perfect conditions to inspire Montpensier to romanticize her life story in her memoirs in order to compensate for the disappointment of her reality: "Cette civilisation de l'orgueil, age d'or retrouvé [...] crée toutes les conditions d'une mythologie héroïque au féminin" (*Culture* 61). Steven Shapiro has shown how Montpensier's connection with the seventeenth-century heroic romance leads many readers to dismiss her *Mémoires* as a mythologized version of the events of her life: "In the estimation of most critics, her memoirs point to an impressionable, uncritical reader and writer who suffers from what Foucault calls 'la folie par identification romanesque'" (19). In the same way, Montpensier has also been understood as an uncritical reader of the pastoral, and her pastoral writing is dismissed as merely escapist.

Writing pastoral literature has often been portrayed as a 'natural' choice for Montpensier, and it is this elision of the process of literary production that devalues her work. Many studies of Montpensier speculate about how the real life and literary pastoral landscapes that surrounded her as a child and an adult influenced her writing, a view that presents her as passively absorbing knowledge of nature from her surroundings. The seeds of her penchant for pastoral writing are often located in the idyllic landscape of her childhood. For Jean Garapon, the Tuileries gardens that were the playground of the

young princess constituted a sheltered fantasy world, where someone already pre-disposed to reverie was easily “lulled” into mixing fiction with reality:

pareille à un âge d’or retrouvé, la nature savante des Tuileries a très bien pu devenir, pour l’imagination ardente de Mademoiselle, un décor interchangeable de pastorale, de roman héroïque, ou encore d’épopée.

(*Culture* 25)

In opposition to the Tuileries’ pastoral paradise of youth, “décor de rêve et de campagne” is the Louvre, cast as the site of culture that loomed at the edge of the garden and the end of childhood (Bouyer, *Grande Mademoiselle* 24). Both Bouyer and Garapon describe the Louvre as a symbol of rationality and adulthood that stood in sharp contrast to the enchanting atmosphere of the Tuileries. Garapon writes: “Les Tuileries la berçaient ainsi de la tentation permanente de la fiction. Pareil climat presque enfantin de fantaisie et d’enchantement disparaîtra avec la splendeur plus solennelle et raisonnable des constructions de Le Notre et Le Vau” (*Culture* 25). These descriptions construct a geography that neatly divides culture/adulthood from nature/childhood. In this narrative we see echoes of Sainte-Beuve’s characterization of Montpensier as an eternal child who refused the responsibility of adulthood by escaping into a dream world.

Montpensier grew up in a court culture in which pastoral art and literature was very much in fashion.<sup>37</sup> She crossed paths with well known authors like Jean Regnault de Segrais, translator of Virgil’s *Eclogues* and *Georgics*, and author of many pastoral

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<sup>37</sup> Fumaroli attributes the popularity of the pastoral at the turn of the seventeenth-century to a desire for a return to calm and stability after the wars of religion. See his chapter “Le Retour d’Astrée,” *Précis de la Littérature Française du XVIIe siècle*, Jean Ménéard, ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1990) 47-64.

works.<sup>38</sup> She also met Balthasar Baro, secretary to Honoré d’Urfé and author of the final volume of the most well-known pastoral novel of the seventeenth century, *L’Astrée* (1607-1627). Garapon writes that the presence of Baro at the Tuileries court must have played a role in fostering Montpensier’s taste for the pastoral, a view that suggests once again that she was particularly susceptible to this influence because she was already a dreamer: “Ce goût semble être au centre de l’oeuvre à venir, de l’imaginaire de Mademoiselle, si sensible au rêve, ou à l’utopie” (“Mademoiselle” 39). He finds evidence of this influence in the style of her memoirs, “nébuleuse à la façon de *L’Astrée*,” and along with many other critics, in her correspondence with Motteville, in which she makes plans for the creation of a pastoral republic. In her social interactions as well, “dans les jeux d’approche interminables qui préludent à l’amour avoué pour Lauzun,” he sees *L’Astrée* at work as a code of conduct for Montpensier in her courtship with M. de Lauzun (*Culture* 43). In Garapon and Bouyer’s work, an implied special connection with the idyllic nature of the Tuileries or of *L’Astrée* is used to explain what these critics see as Montpensier’s unreasonable nature.

By contrast, feminist reappraisals of Montpensier’s work have sought to revalue her, but in doing so their strategy has been to disconnect her from nature. Recognizing that Montpensier’s connection to a devalued nature has kept her work outside the realm of ‘serious’ culture, critics wanting to establish the value of her work insist on

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<sup>38</sup> Recent studies of Segrais include S. Guelloz and M.G. Lallemand, eds., *Jean-Regnaud de Segrais: actes du colloque de Caen, 9 et 10 mars 2006* (Biblio 17 no 173, 2007). See also Wessie Tipping, *Jean Regnaud de Segrais: l’homme et son oeuvre* (Genève: Slatkine, 1978), and Léon Brédif, *Segrais: Sa vie et ses oeuvres* (Paris: Auguste Durand, 1863).

disassociating her from nature, and particularly from the kind of idyllic nature associated with conventional pastoral. Responding to readers' tendency to romanticize Montpensier's exile at her country estate of Saint-Fargeau after her participation in the Fronde, Madeleine Bertaud reminds us not to pastoralize:

Ne nous y trompons pas: Saint-Fargeau n'avait rien d'un paradis pastoral.

Et la cousine de Louis XIV n'y vint pas avec une âme de bergère [...] Il faut se souvenir de Saint-Fargeau, et des désagréments que la mémorialiste y connut, lorsqu'on la voit céder à la tentation bucolique. ("En Marge" 280)

In the same vein as Raymond Williams' analysis of English pastoral literature as the perpetrator of a dangerous cover-up of the darker aspects of rural life, Bertaud argues that the label 'pastoral' threatens our understanding of Montpensier and her work because of its potential to mask the great difficulty and the material reality of her introduction to country life, a reality that Montpensier herself attests to in her memoirs. Bertaud cites a well-known passage from Montpensier's memoirs that describes the moment of her arrival at Saint-Fargeau:

il fallut mettre pied à terre, le pont étant rompu. J'entrai dans une vieille maison où il n'y avait ni porte ni fenêtre et de l'herbe jusqu'aux genoux dans la cour: j'en eus une grande horreur [...] La peur, l'horreur, et le chagrin me saisirent à un tel point que je me mis à pleurer: je me trouvais bien malheureuse, étant hors de la Cour, de n'avoir pas une plus belle demeure que celle-là, et de songer que c'était le plus beau de tous mes châteaux. (289)

Reading this passage, we are asked to recognize, to borrow a term from Stacy Alaimo, that Montpensier *traveled* to nature and that her journey was challenging. Montpensier, like other women authors of pastoral, is not ‘naturally’ inclined to produce this particular kind of literature. Disrupting the notion that women are a part of nature is an important part of reasserting the value of their work.

Bertaud’s reading of Montpensier points to how pastoral convention undermines the significance of an author’s project because it is understood as lacking a strong sense of place. Pastoral texts are understood to occupy a temporally and geographically undefined place, and a non-place is an unlikely base from which to establish cultural power. In the introduction to her edition and translation of the correspondence between Montpensier and Motteville, Joan DeJean seeks to disentangle Montpensier’s work from conventional pastoral nature by reasserting its connection to a more concrete geography. DeJean cautions that drawing parallels between the pastoral community Montpensier plans in her letters and the classical pastoral world described by writers like Virgil is misleading:

Obvious literary references should not lull us into believing that Montpensier intended that her project be absolutely timeless [...] in particular the air of unreality that the pastoral context lends to the project should not cause us to forget the concrete, practical details that give Montpensier’s project its particular character. (18-19)

In this statement DeJean addresses how pastoral’s perceived lack of placeness puts it in opposition to culture, or to historical ‘reality.’ In addition to DeJean, other critics have

also discussed how a pastoral context can sap energy from literary utopias, because of an understanding of nature as disconnected from and inferior to cultural reality. In her work on early modern female utopias, Nicole Pohl describes how an association with the pastoral undermines the status of female utopias as serious propositions of alternative models of living. She attributes the “problematic” relationship between utopia and the pastoral to the ways in which pastoral comes to be “the *primum mobile* for mere escapist visions of courtly love and the pleasures of a happy rural life seemingly in simplicity and equality” (18). In her work on literary utopias, Lee Cullen Khanna argues that a gendered hierarchy is perpetuated by critics, in which less “realistic” utopias are feminized and devalued because of their perceived evasion of reality. For example, this is the hierarchy that underpins Anne Mellor’s essay “On Feminist Utopias,” in which Mellor identifies “abstract” utopias as being “merely wish-fulfillment fantasies,” as opposed to “concrete” utopias, which are “viable blueprints for future political and social organization” (1). Khanna argues that the abstract/concrete distinction made by critics such as Mellor “mimics a gender ideology that casts the feminine as pleasurable distraction from masculine work and duty” (18). What undermines the seriousness of utopias is their proximity to the feminine and, I would add in the case of pastoral utopias, to the natural. As a consequence of this conception, critics have argued the feminist potential of Montpensier’s pastoral republic by emphasizing its concrete aspects, which act as antidotes for the enchanting influence of pastoral nature -- being lulled, forgetting, and ceding to bucolic temptation. However, by attending to how pastoral literature brings together idyllic and ‘concrete’ nature, bringing the leisure of the eclogues into

conversation with the labor of the georgics, we can get around the problematic hierarchy identified by Khanna.

Certain feminist and ecofeminist theory offers a critique of the gendered notions of nature that operate to marginalize pastoral literature and women writing pastoral. As mentioned earlier, in order to complicate the idea that woman is already in nature, Alaimo discusses women nature writers as having “traveled” to nature (16). Recognizing that there are specific motivations for choosing a literary mode like the pastoral counters the idea that authors such as Montpensier are simply following a natural inclination to confuse fiction and reality, or to escape real life. For Alaimo, nature holds great potential as a site of resistance to culturally determined gender roles because it represents an “undomesticated” space “utterly free from confining concepts, values and roles” (16). Without arguing, as many first-wave ecofeminists have, that women have any special relationship with the natural world, Alaimo has explored the ways in which American women writers have recast nature as a feminist space, establishing that female subjectivity does not have to be dependent on transcendence of the natural, the bodily, and the material. The body of feminist and ecofeminist work on the connections between women and nature informs Terry Gifford’s theory of the post-pastoral. As a theory that brings together ecofeminist concerns and questions of the literary identity of the pastoral, the post-pastoral provides a useful critical framework to approach Montpensier’s writing.

### **Traveling toward the post-pastoral**



For a better understanding of the work of women writing nature, we must reassess our view of the pastoral as a genre that traffics in traps. In turn, women writing pastoral literature can help us understand how pastoral gets beyond those traps. Gifford's theory incorporates ecocritical strategies for redefining nature and culture in a way that allows for the revaluing of women, nature, and nature writing. While they do not necessarily contain a more concrete, realistic portrayal of rural life, post-pastoral texts present the complexity of the relationship between nature and culture.<sup>39</sup> Among the six criteria for the post-pastoral that Gifford outlines, three are particularly relevant to a reading of Montpensier: the recognition that our inner human nature can be understood in relation to external nature; an awareness of both nature as culture and of culture as nature; and finally, "the ecofeminist realisation that the exploitation of the planet is of the same mindset as the exploitation of women and minorities" (*Pastoral* 152, 162). While Gifford is most interested in the ramifications that post-pastoral literature can have for the ailing human-nature relationship, I want to emphasize the post-pastoral's capacity to recuperate nature as ground on which female subjectivity can be built. The post-pastoral is a useful critical category for reading Montpensier's pastoral, because it helps us understand how she uses nature as a source of power, and as a means to confront reality rather than to escape it.

Montpensier's writing enacts a post-pastoral breaking down of the dualistic relationship between the natural and the cultural. The destabilization of these categories

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<sup>39</sup> One critique levelled against ecocritical theory is that it lacks complexity, and that it can be reduced to a call for more realistic representations of the natural world in literature. See especially Dana Phillips, *The Truth of Ecology: Nature, Culture and Literature in America* (Oxford University Press, 2003).

takes place primarily through the foregrounding of that which is rendered invisible by dualistic thinking: women's intellectual and physical labor, and the importance of nature, not just as an idyllic background, but as a force that shapes the text. In the pastoral lands Montpensier creates, writing, building, and working the land is revealed to be just as much of a feminine pursuit as a masculine one; similarly, the countryside is invested with just as much significance as the court. My discussion of how Montpensier redefines nature in this way builds on Juliette Cherbuliez's work on how Montpensier establishes the "place" of exile. Cherbuliez shows how the geopolitics of exile under Louis XIV construct a space that is seen to be outside of, and inferior to, the cultural center of court. When unruly courtiers such as Montpensier were banished to the country, they were seen to be relegated to a place devoid of meaning. Thus, at the base of the logic of exile is a dualistic conception of nature and culture that sees nature as a politically insignificant blank slate. Montpensier's pastoral texts demonstrate that a literary mode associated with nature, leisure, and escape from reality can create a place of power. According to Cherbuliez, the pastoral mode as Montpensier uses it "allows for the empty time of banishment to become the full, creative time of exile" (*Place of Exile* 74). Montpensier writes a nature that resists the notion of exile as a marginal and mysterious place that is inferior to and discontinuous with culture.

By recasting nature as a site of women's power, where the cultural work of literary production and community building occurs, Montpensier reconfigures traditional connections between women, work and nature. My discussion of Montpensier's pastoral begins with her *Mémoires* and an exploration of her record of how rural life facilitates the

work of literary production and self-cultivation. Turning next to *Les Nouvelles Françaises ou les Divertissements de la Princesse Aurélie* (1659), I propose to consider how Montpensier disrupts the nature/culture hierarchy by emphasizing the shared characteristics of life at court and life in retreat, and by articulating how nature shapes literary production. Thirdly, I analyze how the post-pastoral utopia elaborated in Montpensier's correspondence with Françoise Bertaut de Motteville (1660) rewrites the cultural roles assigned to women through its rewriting of pastoral nature. In a text that breaks down the distinction between idyllic fiction and concrete "blueprint" for a model of living, Montpensier and Motteville use the undomesticated space of nature to envision a world in which women are not constrained by marriage. Finally, I consider Montpensier's *La Relation de l'Isle Imaginaire* (1659) as a text that uses pastoral convention to disrupt masculine illusions of mastery over nature.

### **Writing Nature in Exile: Montpensier's *Mémoires***

Montpensier began writing her *Mémoires* in 1653, shortly after she was banished to her country estate of Saint-Fargeau for her participation in the Fronde. For DeJean, the fact that the memoirs project coincides with Montpensier's exile is "the clearest indication of her intention to replace the making of history with the writing of history" (*Tender Geographies* 55). Considering the memoirs through the lens of the post-pastoral, however, allows us to get past the distinction that DeJean seems to make between direct and indirect forms of political activity. Montpensier disrupts the opposition between the placeness of history and the non-placeness of literary spaces. Montpensier's 'retreat' to

the country does not signal her withdrawal from the political; her new location facilitates political intervention in ways that were impossible at court. Montpensier opens her memoirs with a reflection on the importance of place, and characterizes her rural exile as a site of productivity. Admitting that she once shared the prevailing opinion that life outside of the cultural center was boring and inferior, she explains that her own experience of country life has changed her mind. In her description of the genesis of her *Mémoires* project, she describes how the leisure of life outside the city enables her to discover her capacity for intellectual work:

depuis que je suis retirée chez moi, j'éprouve avec douceur que le souvenir de tout ce qui s'est passé dans la vie occupe assez agréablement, pour ne pas compter le temps de la retraite pour un des moins agréables que l'on passe. Outre que c'est un état très-propre à se le représenter dans son ordre, l'on y trouve le loisir nécessaire pour le mettre par écrit, de sorte que la facilité que je sens à me ressouvenir de tout ce que j'ai vu et même de ce qui m'est arrivé, me fait prendre aujourd'hui à la prière de quelques personnes que j'aime, une peine à laquelle je n'aurois jamais cru pouvoir me résoudre. (1:21)

Throughout her memoirs, Montpensier continues to describe nature as facilitating self-cultivation.<sup>40</sup> Apart from writing, reading is also an activity that is fostered at Saint-Fargeau. When she is finally allowed to leave Saint-Fargeau after her first period of exile,

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<sup>40</sup> For Garapon, rural living provided the opportunity for Segrais' influence to take hold: "Jusqu'à son départ pour Saint-Fargeau, la princesse mène une existence trop dispersée pour que cette influence manifeste pleinement sa fécondité... Dans le 'désert' pourtant égayé de Saint-Fargeau, il en ira tout autrement, et l'influence de Segrais, commencée de longue date, pourra alors porter tous ses fruits" (*Culture* 52).

she implies that returning to all the distractions of court will mean returning to conditions that are less favorable to reading and writing. She regrets not having learned Italian in order to read Tasso during her time at Saint-Fargeau. She recognizes that as a courtier she *should* prefer life in Paris and proximity to the king above all else, and that her regret upon leaving the country and consequently leaving Tasso is somewhat subversive. She confesses that she is not as happy to return to court as she should be: “En vérité, je ne sentoies pas tant de joie que l’on eut cru [...] Quoi qu’il fut fort beau, peu de gens auroient été fâchés d’aller à Paris pour ne pas lire le Tasse” (1:441). Throughout her memoirs she repeatedly defends Saint-Fargeau against the implication that the site of her exile is a rustic no-man’s land. She continually works to validate, define, and make visible this space that is seen to be outside the borders of civilization.

Country living opens up the possibility for self-cultivation, and it also enables the creative activities of building and planting. Soon after her arrival at the dilapidated Saint-Fargeau, she begins work on repairing and remodeling the chateau and its grounds, enlisting the help of architect Le Vau.<sup>41</sup> Montpensier’s image of the country as a site that facilitates creativity -- whether through building or writing -- emerges particularly clearly in the memoirs when she describes moments of leaving Saint-Fargeau, as in the anecdote about Tasso, or returning to Saint-Fargeau after time spent at court: “En arrivant à Saint-Fargeau, j’eus une joie de celles que l’on a à la campagne: je trouvai l’appartement, que

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<sup>41</sup> See Cherbuliez, “Before and Beyond Versailles: The Counter-Court of the Duchesse de Montpensier,” *Nottingham French Studies* 39.2 (2000): 129-139, Mayer, “Mademoiselle de Montpensier et l’architecture,” *Mademoiselle de Montpensier: Trois études d’après ses Mémoires* (Biblio 17, no 54. Paris: PFSCCL, 1989), and Jean Guillaume “La galerie dans les distributions du château français,” *Revue de l’art* 102 (1993): 32-41.

je faisais accomoder, achevé” (1:316). At another moment she describes a similar joy upon returning to Saint-Fargeau for Christmas: “j’y fus trois ou quatre jours avec plaisir. Car j’en prends tout à fait à voir mon bâtiment, et à y trouver quelque chose d’achevé au dedans toutes les fois que j’y vais” (2:22). In the process of transforming the chateau and the grounds into a dwelling more fit for a princess, Montpensier participates in intellectual and physical work that would have been considered inappropriate for a women belonging to a social class that distanced itself from labor. In the early days of the construction on her chateau, Montpensier asks her advisor Prefontaine to keep her informed of all expenses, so she can be sure no one is stealing from her. Conscious that the kind of education she is acquiring through her participation in the building process might be seen as inappropriate for a woman of her rank, Montpensier assures Prefontaine that this knowledge does not compromise her in any way: “Cela n’est point au-dessous d’une grande princesse: moins on la vole, plus elle est en état de faire du bien” (1: 301). At the same time that she is learning the cost of bricks and plaster, Montpensier is learning how to build her own court, attracting courtiers, as well as musicians and theater troupes, to Saint-Fargeau.<sup>42</sup>

Cherbuliez has shown how Montpensier’s creation of a sense of place at Saint-Fargeau can be seen as an act of resistance to banishment: “if banishment is meant to create a space of exile that is unnamed, unimaginable, uncharted territory, resistance to it is to be found in the act of naming, mapping, and giving social meaning to that space” (*Place of Exile* 46). Part of the “placeness” of exile is established through Montpensier’s

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<sup>42</sup> See Cherbuliez, *The Place of Exile* 51-59.

space-altering activities, but her memoirs also attend to the qualities of the existing “undomesticated” landscape that offer her the freedom to carry out these activities.<sup>43</sup> The very absence of social structure and physical structure that she encounters at Saint-Fargeau are seen in the memoirs as empowering. Montpensier redefines the nature of exile by destabilizing the dualistic relationship between passive, feminine nature and active, masculine culture. In her *Mémoires*, Montpensier identifies nature as a liberating force, and this is how nature continues to be cast in her pastoral fiction, as we will see in *Les Nouvelles Françaises ou les Divertissements de la Princesse Aurélie*.

**Idyllic and Identifiable: *Les Nouvelles Françaises ou les Divertissements de la Princesse Aurélie***

In addition to the account in her *Mémoires*, the story of Montpensier’s life at Saint-Fargeau also appears in a pastoral *roman à clé* written during her exile. *Les Nouvelles françaises ou les Divertissements de la Princesse Aurélie* (1656) is a collection of novellas that Montpensier wrote in collaboration with her secretary, Jean Regnault de Segrais. Blending historical reality with fiction in the style of *L’Astrée*, the *Nouvelles* feature a bucolic setting that Jean Garapon describes as “une Arcadie [...] à la fois identifiable et iréel” (*Culture* 175). The text negotiates between idyllic nature of pastoral convention and the ‘real’ nature of Saint-Fargeau. Segrais was one of the most prominent

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<sup>43</sup> Cholakian points out how Montpensier’s memoirs can also be seen as undomesticated in their appropriation of a patriarchal literary genre to tell the story of a woman’s confrontation with marginality, “A House of Her Own: Marginality and Dissidence in the *Mémoires* of La Grande Mademoiselle (1627-1693),” *Prose Studies* 9.3 (December 1986) 4.

authors of pastoral literature of the period, and as such he was involved in seventeenth-century debates about pastoral aesthetics. This debate, which I will discuss in greater detail in the following chapter, was essentially about what kind of a place pastoral literature was meant to represent: a timeless image of a tranquil life, or a vision that corresponded more closely to the reality of rural living.<sup>44</sup> According to many of his contemporaries, including Bernard le Bouvier de Fontenelle, Segrais succeeded in reaching the ideal balance between *bienséance* and *vraisemblance* by presenting a plausible version of rural life that did not offend the sensibilities of readers with too many details of the less picturesque aspects of that life. The 1733 edition of his *Eglogues* contains a short history of his life in which one critic applauds Segrais' ability to depict the life of shepherds with believable simplicity, without crossing over into vulgar details of the rural peasant lifestyle:

il a bien pris le caractère de l'Eglogue, et qu'il a sçu attraper ce point de la simplicité et de la pudeur, que les anciens avaient sçu exprimer sans pourtant avoir rien de la bassesse et des manières niaises où sont tombés plusieurs de nos faiseurs d'Eglogues Françaises, qui ont voulu imiter la naïveté ancienne, pour ne pas sortir du caractère Bucolique. (ii)

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<sup>44</sup> Ecocritic Lawrence Buell describes early-modern pastoral as becoming “more mimetically particularized” and representing a “turn from fictive Arcadia toward material referent,” *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001) 144. Madeleine Bertaud also identifies a “courant bucolique,” or an interest in the material reality of rural life that emerged in seventeenth-century pastoral, *Le XVIIe siècle, Littérature Française* (Nancy: Presses universitaires de Nancy, 1998) 44.



The effort to find the perfect balance between believability and propriety demonstrated in Segrais' *Eglogues* is also of central importance in the *Nouvelles*.

The *Nouvelles* are most often discussed in terms of their contribution to the definition of the novella, and its articulation as a genre designed to present a more authentic image of real life events than novels.<sup>45</sup> The novella is defined in the text as a genre that balances *bienséance* with *vraisemblance* but that values historical accuracy more than the novel. As Montpensier's literary counterpart Princesse Aurélie explains, "le roman écrit ces choses comme la bienséance le veut, et à la manière du poète, mais que la nouvelle doit un peu davantage tenir de l'histoire" (1: 99). Cherbuliez describes how the increased concern for realism translates in the *Nouvelles* as a "reliance on precise notions of place" (*Place of Exile* 69). Just as this collection of novellas attends to place in a new way, it also invests a new sense of place in pastoral nature. The pastoral context of the novellas facilitates rather than interferes with the text's attempt to "tenir de l'histoire."

The reader of the *Nouvelles* recognizes Saint-Fargeau in the "Chateau des Six Tours," but in contrast to Montpensier, Princess Aurélie has chosen to leave court rather than be expelled. After the violent agitations of life, Aurélie and the members of her court -- Uralie, Silerite, Aplanice, Gélonide and Frontenie -- express relief at having found a place that offers both stability and safety. This stability is contrasted with their previous feelings of being adrift in stormy waters. The description of their journey to their pastoral retreat recalls Montpensier's description of her journey into exile, after she was stripped

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<sup>45</sup> See Roger Guichemerre, "Segrais ou la diversité romanesque," *Littératures Classiques* 15 (1991): 185-193.

of her place in the court hierarchy and sent without direction into unknown territory. The women describe themselves as directionless vessels who have been tossed about until they come to rest on shore, comparing their happiness to “celle des navires qui, ayant été mille fois sur le point d’être abîmés dans la tempête, enfin rencontrent le port par quelque accident heureux” (1:15). In this description of how these women have traveled to nature, it is life at court that is portrayed as wild and unknowable, in contrast to the peaceful existence of the Chateau des Six Tours.

DeJean notes that the *Nouvelles* were being written at the same time as Scudéry was working on the final volume of *Artamène*, “in which Sapho’s entrance signals the death of the action-oriented model for fiction and in which the new amazons owe their independence to the power of the word rather than the power of the sword” (*Tender Geographies* 55). Like the nature of Montpensier’s memoirs, however, the nature we encounter in the *Nouvelles* is not the setting for a retreat from physical or intellectual action. The extensive space devoted to describing women’s work in the text belies the notion of life in the margin as outside of the realm of political activity (Cherbuliez). As we shall see, the *Nouvelles* destabilizes the gendered nature/culture divide through its depiction of an active nature that intervenes in literary production, its examination of the relationship between rural and urban lifestyles, and its foregrounding of women’s work.

Going beyond the trope of nature as inspiring creativity, the *Nouvelles* casts nature as an agent involved in literary production. The relationship between the human and nonhuman can be said to be “interanimating” in the sense that the stories are co-

created by the women and by the natural environment at the chateau.<sup>46</sup> Nonhuman nature is an important character, and the text is explicit about how this nature interacts with human characters. It is a comparison of the landscape at the Chateau des Six Tours to the pastoral novel *L'Astrée* that first sparks the conversation about the utility of novels, and eventually about the text that will serve as a model for their storytelling, Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron* (1558).<sup>47</sup> The *Heptaméron* serves as a model not only in structure -- *nouvelles* followed by discussion between the group of *devisants* -- but also in the important role that nature plays in the creation of the stories. The stories of the *Heptaméron* are produced during a period of rural isolation brought about by a flood that destroys the bridges back to civilization. It is this kind of production that Princess Aurélie wants to imitate at the Chateau des Six Tours: "Je vous avoue aussi que je trouve qu'ils avaient assez de plaisir en leur solitude et je crois que, si la reine de Navarre ne se fût point lassée d'écrire ou que le pont ne se fût point refait, ils raconteraient encore leurs histoires. Je pense même que nous ne ferions pas mal, si nous faisions comme eux" (1:23). The idea to follow each story with entertainment organized by each woman is also described as being brought about by nonhuman nature. It is the entertaining sight of dogs chasing a hare as the women follow in their carriage that inspires Aurélie to include the *divertissements* in the women's activities (1:101).

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<sup>46</sup> Ecofeminist critics Greta Gaard and Patrick Murphy see the notion of "interanimation" as a way around traditional subject/object, self/other dualisms, *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy*, Greta Gaard and Patrick Murphy, eds. (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1998) 6.

<sup>47</sup> See Nicholas Paige, "The Storyteller and the Book: Scenes of Narrative Production in the Early French Novel," *Modern Language Quarterly* 67.2 (June 2006): 141-170.

Natural features of particular locations of the grounds of the Chateau des Six Tours shape the women's choices of where to tell their stories. As the rules for storytelling are being worked out by the group, Gélonide highlights the connection between literary production and the physical site of storytelling. Each woman in turn will be "maîtresse de la promenade et arbitre du lieu où elle voudra raconter son histoire. Car, jugeant des autres par moi-même, je vous assure qu'il y a tel lieu où je trouve que mon récit aurait trois fois plus de grâce qu'en un autre" (1:95). When it is Uralie's turn to be "maîtresse de la journée," the women are obliged to spend the day inside because of potential spring showers and cold temperatures. As Silerite ends her story the women arrive at a particularly striking spot, where they cannot help but stop their conversation to express their awe for the place. Before commencing their discussion of Silerite's story, the women all pay their respects, offering it "l'hommage de l'admiration qui lui est dû" (2:528).

In the *Nouvelles*, it is men who occupy the background and the margins where women and nature are conventionally found. A male narrator is charged by Princess Aurélie with the task of observing and recording the activities of the women at the chateau. Throughout the text, he is constantly confronted with the limits of his ability to tell the women's story.<sup>48</sup> His inability to master the story comes in part from the constant motion of the women. On one occasion, he misses parts of the conversation because the women get into their carriage (1:100). At another point we see the narrator riding

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<sup>48</sup> Cherbuliez notes that "Segrais' stories in the *Nouvelles françaises* are embedded inextricably in practices that work to deny him authority over them," *The Place of Exile* 71.

alongside the carriage, doing his best to hear their conversation over the noise and being distracted by the difficult terrain (2:489). The movement of women ‘traveling’ to nature and in nature plays an important role in transforming nature into a feminist space. Alaimo describes how the representation of women’s mobility facilitates “disidentifying from sedimented notions of womanhood” (22). Disrupting the notion of a nostalgic, unchanging nature, the women of the Chateau des Six Tours are on the move, writing their own nature.<sup>49</sup>

The narrator cannot keep up with the women, nor can he speak in their place. He is always reminding the reader that he cannot speak for the women whose story he is telling. Princess Aurélie’s story is preceded by the narrator’s admission that, although he has done his best to capture every word of her story in order to report it to the reader, “il n’y a pourtant qu’elle-même qui pût avoir écrit cette nouvelle avec autant de perfection et d’agrément qu’elle la raconta” (1:24). He introduces Gélonide’s novella with a similar deference to the woman’s voice: “Je ne l’ai pas écrite aussi galamment qu’elle la récita; mais, pour mon honneur et pour ton plaisir, figure-toi, lecteur, que je te raconte cette troisième nouvelle avec les mêmes grâces qu’elle la raconta et que c’est elle qui va parler” (1:190). Just as the *Nouvelles* reconfigures traditional relationships between men and women, subject and object, it also challenges the marginalization of nature in relation to culture by breaking down differences between the country and the court.

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<sup>49</sup> This movement can be contrasted with a “freezing of movement and of time” reflected in the gardens and palace of Versailles, where absolutist aesthetics sought to communicate “the submission of culture to the sovereign through the total regulation of movement,” Cherbuliez, *The Place of Exile* 14.

Throughout the text, comparisons are made between Paris and the Chateau des Six Tours that dispel the myth that the country is devoid of culture. Paris proves not to have an exclusive hold on diverting entertainment, and the women at the chateau do not experience any cultural deprivation as a result of being outside of the city: “les ballets de la Cour et les passetemps de Paris n’en rendaient à personne l’éloignement ennuyeux” (1:15). The landscape around the chateau is a harmonious collaboration of the work of nature and humans, comparing favorably to more conventional heavily ornamented royal residences:

Des bois en éloignement, de petites plaines, des vergers plantés avec symétrie y composent l’agréable variété des parterres, qui sont faits par l’artifice des hommes; et de ce différent assemblage se forme un tout si parfait et si charmant que ceux qui ont bâti ce vieux château, ont avec raison négligé de l’embellir d’aucun de ces ornements qui sont recherchés avec soin dans toutes les autres maisons des grands princes. (1:16)

Nature has been altered to make the place more fit for human inhabitants, but the noble residence has forsaken traditional cultural marks of grandeur in order to better suit the natural surroundings.

The borders between the built and the natural environment are blurred in descriptions of the chateau and its grounds. On two occasions, the environment at the chateau reminds the women of specific locations in Paris. Walking through the river valley one spring day, the grass, the sunlight, and the particular shade of green of the trees “faisaient à l’envi à qui lui représenterait le plus parfaitement le riant aspect des

Tuileries” (1:17). When Aplanice stages a play for her companions, her choice of the play *Amarillis* is motivated by the resemblance of an area of the chateau’s grounds to the Hôtel de Bourgogne, where the same work had been performed. While the location’s resemblance to a theater seems to be the work of nature -- “il y avait un petit Tertre qui heureusement s’élevait dans cette figure même qu’on donne d’ordinaire aux Théâtres,” -- there is ambiguity about whether the specific resemblance to the Hôtel de Bourgogne is a purely natural occurrence, or whether Aplanice has altered the landscape to suit her purposes: “Enfin par quelque caprice de la nature, ou par l’industrie d’Aplanice, ce lieu était tout à fait semblable au théâtre de l’Hôtel de Bourgogne” (2:369). Other locations on the grounds are also described in terms of a combination of nature and culture. The description of the island where Frontenie chooses to tell her story emphasizes this collaboration. Trees have been planted on the island to add to its natural appeal, its “heureuse situation” (2:459). Frontenie puts in some work of her own to make the island even more accommodating for her companions, creating a “salle verte” by weaving tree branches together: “elle avait fait plier ces arbres avec un artifice admirable [...] Les branches des arbres artistement entrelacées les unes dans les autres” (2:459). When Silerite ends her story, the narrator remarks that the women’s carriage is in such a beautiful spot that it is hard to believe it is the work of nature alone: “on a peine à croire que ce qui n’est qu’un jeu de la nature ne soit pas quelque effort de l’industrie des hommes, qui auraient pris soin d’aplanir cette place” (2:527). Throughout the text, place is understood to be co-produced by human and non-human nature.

By insisting on the similarities between supposedly contained and contrasting spaces of nature and culture, country and city, the text confirms the impossibility of maintaining a neat separation between the natural and the cultural. When the women debate over the relative merits of urban and rural life, the categories of nature and culture prove to be too unstable to declare any winner. Gélonide's argument for the superiority of urban life hinges on demonstrating that the country and the city are not as different as they seem, that the values typically ascribed to nature are also present in culture, and that the negative characteristics attributed to the urban are also present in the country. As women who have lived most of their lives at court, Princess Aurélie and her companions are particularly susceptible to romanticized images of country life:

j'ai sujet d'appréhender que l'ignorance où elles peuvent être des incommodités de la campagne, ne leur en ôte le dégoût, que l'apparence de l'honnête et douce liberté ne surprenne leur imagination; et que cette innocence qui semble être jointe à la solitude, ne se serve de la leur pour séduire leur jugement. Mais cette innocence et cette honnête liberté se trouve dans les Villes comme dans les bocages, et les incommodités de la vie champêtre sont grandes. (2:463)

She asks her companions to consider how their experience of rural life is mediated by culture, especially by their social class. At the outset of her argument, she stresses the need to limit the scope of the debate to the quality of city or country life as experienced by a person of their social status: "La demeure de la campagne ou de la ville ne nous doit être agréable ou odieuse que par les dégoûts ou par les agréments qu'une personne de condition y peut trouver" (2:463). As noble women they have a certain amount of



mobility and are not forced, as are those who actually live off of the land, to confront the darker aspects of life in the country such as harsh winters, grinding poverty, and a landscape saturated with traumatic memories of war. She also reminds them of how rarely a group of women of their quality finds the opportunity to socialize in the country. In the city they have more freedom to choose their company, to “faire une société à sa fantaisie,” whereas in the country there is no way to escape bothersome neighbors of a lower class who seek “la petite gloire d’être souffert d’une personne de la Cour” (2:465). She argues that there are spaces in the city where the women can enjoy being in nature as much as they would in the country: “que faisons-nous ici, que nous ne puissions faire dans une promenade de Saint-Cloud? La terre prend-elle une plus belle robe à la nouvelle saison dans la Province la plus éloignée, que dans les beaux jardins des Tuileries ou de Luxembourg?” (2:466) Gélonide ends her argument by calling for a retreat to the city, adding a final reminder of the participation of culture in their experience of nature: “quittons un séjour qui sans notre artifice n’aurait rien que de très ennuyeux” (2:467).

Silerite’s argument for the superiority of life in the country also points to similarities between the country and the city. She describes the urban bourgeois as the equivalent to the importunate country neighbor depicted by Gélonide: “Si je voulais vous faire la peinture de ce que dans le monde on appelle un vrai Bourgeois, je vous ferais voir un aussi ridicule personnage que le Campagnard que vous nous avez proposé” (2:469). Silerite argues that the scars of war are just as present in the city as in the country, and that peace will return to both of these places in the same way. In responding to Gélonide’s point about experiencing nature in the city, Silerite calls attention to the

shifting border between nature and culture that is operating in their debate. The places that Gélonide has identified as locations where one can experience nature in the city cannot be unproblematically considered as part of culture: “par quel droit vous voulez que vos promenades aux lieux les plus délicieux des environs de Paris, soient de l’essence de la demeure des Villes” (2:470). Echoing Gélonide’s argument that what the women truly like about the country can be attributed more to culture-- the company of other noble women that allows them to reproduce the pleasures of the city in the country, and the mobility that allows them to escape the harsh realities of country life-- Silerite argues that by including nature in her argument for the superiority of city life, Gélonide reveals a similar dependence between the cultural and the natural: “Quand vous nous vantez ce plaisir, n’est-ce pas avouer vous-même que votre vie que vous nous figurez si agréable, serait très ennuyeuse sans la participation des plaisirs de la nôtre?” (2:470) If Gélonide is going to redraw the lines between nature and culture by considering places such as Saint-Cloud as part of the city, Silerite argues that she might just as well consider country homes and palaces as part of nature. If natural spaces are part of culture, as they are in Gélonide’s argument for the superiority of life in the city, then Silerite reasons that the built environment can also be part of nature, and that her argument for the superiority of life in the country can include “la beauté des Palais et l’agrément des belles maisons” (2:470).

Although the debate remains unsettled, a unified idea of the good life emerges, one that is not tied specifically to nature or culture, but to freedom and female community. Both women’s arguments center on freedom, especially in the context of

choosing one's company. While Gélonide argues that urban life provides more opportunities for social gatherings, Silerite maintains that just because the city has more people does not mean that there are more people of quality, and that in the country one has greater liberty to choose social interactions. The country offers the most important advantage, the ability to be "maîtresse de sa vie et de ses actions, de n'avoir point à en rendre compte à une infinité de sottés gens dont la censure importune s'en fait aussi bien la maîtresse que l'opinion des plus sages" (2:474). Both Gélonide and Silerite express doubts about the sustainability of the kind of life they have been living at the Chateau des Six Tours, but in the end Silerite evokes the power of the *idea* of a community of women making their own choices. The knowledge that this kind of life may only be a temporary state does not make it less real or less meaningful: "Maintenons-nous dans un état si heureux le plus longtemps qu'il nous sera possible, ou du moins conservons-en l'idée tant que nous vivrons" (2:474). The subversive power of the alternative lifestyle they have led does not fade even if it ceases to exist in reality.

The *Nouvelles* moves beyond a dualistic conception of nature and culture by positing nature as a space of cultural productivity and female community. Literary and lived nature come together in this text in productive ways. Alongside the 'non-fictional' account of Montpensier's time in exile in her *Mémoires*, the story told in the *Nouvelles* appears as an equally valid means of representing an alternative to the social and gender hierarchies of court. In her correspondence with Mme de Motteville, another text located on the border between literary and lived nature, Montpensier uses the pastoral to

elaborate an alternative model for living. She plans a “pastoral republic” that draws on nature as a force that makes female freedom and community possible.

### **Undomesticated Natures: The “République Champêtre”**

In her memoirs, Montpensier describes the moment when the idea for a pastoral republic first came to her. Walking alone along the seaside in Saint-Jean-de-Luz where the court was celebrating the marriage of Louis XIV to the Spanish Infanta, meditating on a recent conversation she overheard about the virtues of solitude and the difficulties of life at court, Montpensier is struck by a bold idea: “il me passa force choses dans l’esprit sur le plan d’une vie solitaire de gens qui se retireroient de la cour sans en être rebutés” (2:146). She shared her plan with Françoise Bertaut de Motteville in a correspondence that began in 1660 and continued for over a year. A part of this correspondence was published in 1667 in the *Recueil de pièces nouvelles et galantes*, and the presentation of the letters in this context displeased Montpensier. She felt that the text of the letters had been altered in a way that distorted their original character: “Pour y avoir voulu augmenter, on les a gâtées [...] les miennes sont beaucoup plus naturelles et mieux écrites” (*Mémoires* 2: 146). In their letters, Montpensier and Motteville elaborate plans for a “république champêtre,” a pastoral community that would provide an alternative to the tumult of life at court and to the restrictive roles available to women in society. Critics have located Montpensier and Motteville’s pastoral republic in the same tradition as *L’Astrée* and the feminine utopias of Scudéry’s *Artamène, ou le Grand Cyrus* and

*Clélie*.<sup>50</sup> Like the pastoral communities in these novels, the “république champêtre” is populated with people who have freely chosen to leave their lives at court; they have traveled to nature in search of a different life, instead of being forced to settle for a life in the margins of culture after being expelled from court. But while Montpensier and Motteville’s project draws on the conventions of the pastoral novel in important ways, it also identifies pastoral traps in these texts that it seeks to avoid. This text is post-pastoral both in its critique of the romanticized nature of pastoral convention and in its denunciation of the ‘natural’ roles assigned to women in society.

The physical and political setting in which the correspondence began has led some critics to interpret the pastoral republic as a manifestation of Montpensier’s desire to retreat from reality. Bertaud speculates that a series of unpleasant events that led up to the correspondence, including the death of her father, “[a] pu développer en elle l’aspiration à un ailleurs” (“En Marge” 282). She insists on the entirely “intellectual” character of the pastoral republic, which should keep us from seeing it as anything Montpensier intended to carry out in reality: “Elle ne pouvait que disposer à l’évasion pastorale -- entendons-nous: une évasion toute intellectuelle, qui amène à prendre la plume pendant des heures [...] non à se lancer dans le plus petit début de réalisation” (“En Marge” 281). For Garapon, Montpensier’s choice to confide her project in Motteville, a

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<sup>50</sup> Sainte-Beuve writes that the correspondence “représente et caractérise la nuance espagnole pastorale qui y régna depuis le roman de d’Urfé jusqu’à ceux de Mlle de Scudery, et à laquelle le bon sens de Louis XIV, aidé de Boileau, allait mettre bon ordre,” *Causeries du Lundi*, vol. 3 (1871) 517. For Bertaud, both the physical setting of *Clélie* and its representation of female community served as inspiration for Montpensier’s project: “Installés assez près de la mer, sur un plateau fertile pourvu de belles fontaines, les ‘illustres solitaires’ de Madeleine de Scudery avaient de quoi plaire à Mademoiselle,” “En Marge” 284.

member of the “vieille cour,” was a sign that she felt alienated from Louis XIV’s generation of courtiers (*Culture* 237). Her project is thus understood as expressing nostalgia for a bygone era. Others interpret the correspondence as expressing a feeling of loss with the change in political climate brought about by Louis XIV’s marriage. Abby Zanger and Joan DeJean have both discussed the letters as a reflection of the consolidation of royal power and the ensuing loss of power for his subjects, particularly women.<sup>51</sup> For DeJean, the timing of Montpensier’s pastoral republic sets it apart from the earlier pastoral communities imagined by Scudéry. While Scudéry’s novels create “a blueprint for an already beginning future” by representing female communities that would later be realized in salon culture, the correspondence between Montpensier and Motteville “marked the death knell of the separate but equal space of the female assemblies” (*Tender Geographies* 62). While DeJean does not deny the subversive power of the text, she reinforces the distinction between the non-place of fiction/nature and the placeness of history/culture. This distinction is an example of the abstract/concrete hierarchy critiqued by Khanna. By establishing nature as a place from which political power can be exercised, however, this post-pastoral text breaks down the distinction between idyllic fiction and “blueprint” for a viable alternative lifestyle. Montpensier does not just write a pastoral text, but imagines living and working in a pastoral community.

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<sup>51</sup> Abby Zanger discusses the role that representations of Louis XIV’s marriage played in constructing his power during a transitional period in his reign in *Scenes from the marriage of Louis XIV: Nuptial fictions and the making of absolutist power* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997). See also Zanger, “Marriage on the margins of monarchy: Politics and the marriage plot in the Motteville-Montpensier correspondence,” *Papers on French Seventeenth-Century Literature* 33.65 (2006): 339-354.

From the beginning of the correspondence Montpensier invests her pastoral utopia with geographical, architectural, and ideological detail. Montpensier identifies two potential locations for the community, on the banks of either the Seine or the Loire, but she imagines that the decision about where to live will be a collaborative one. She conceives of a pastoral republic that is not sealed off from culture. Like Saint-Fargeau, this community will be at a sufficient distance from court, but close enough to maintain relationships and even exert influence over those living there. Books, letters, and people will move regularly between these two sites, between the country and the court, a movement that will give the inhabitants of Montpensier's republic an even more intense appreciation and understanding of their pastoral home. In a passage reminiscent of certain moments of her memoirs, Montpensier imagines that during her visits to court, she will have to keep her preference for country life a secret:

quand j'y serais je voudrais m'accommoder aux autres et me rendre commode.

Néanmoins je crois que je m'ennuierais fort, et que j'aurais grande joie de retourner, mais je ne le témoignerais pas de crainte que cette affectation ne me fit haïr, ou ne m'exposât à la raillerie d'autant plus dangereuse qu'elle est bien fondée et qu'on se l'attire par des façons ridicules. (30)

Preference for pastoral living emerges as a subversive declaration of independence from cultural authority. Montpensier imagines that people at court will learn that the lifestyle enjoyed by the residents of the pastoral republic rivals their own, and a shift in power will take place in their interactions: "je pense que nous deviendrons tels, qu'il leur seroit plus glorieux de nous écrire qu'à nous de leur faire réponse" (8).

Through her description of intellectual and physical labor that goes into creating her republic, Montpensier disrupts the notion of a static nature with which women effortlessly commune. The correspondence is a record of how a natural space will be transformed by its inhabitants, but it also acknowledges the ways in which the members of the pastoral community will need to adapt to their surroundings. This is not a ready-made paradise, it has to be built and planted, and it is this process that occupies much of the text. Her plan also makes visible the darker realities of rural life. Although the republic will be made up of people of noble birth, the less fortunate inhabitants of the countryside are not forgotten. A hospital will be built where members of the community will help less fortunate children.<sup>52</sup>

To construct her pastoral community, and to envision the rules that govern the activity there, Montpensier combines elements from fiction and reality. She is careful to identify how her community will depart from the pastoral examples of d'Urfé and Scudéry. Whereas *L'Astrée's* idyllic countryside is the setting for romance, Montpensier's pastoral republic forbids marriage and foregrounds female friendship as the most valued mode of socialization. The vogue at court for dressing as shepherds to recreate scenes from *L'Astrée* is a kind of theatrical imitation of the pastoral from which Montpensier wants to distance her project. While she does not imagine that the noble

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<sup>52</sup> For DeJean, Montpensier's "vision of socially responsible rural life" foreshadows the eighteenth-century English tradition of being more attentive to the conditions of rural workers on country estates (*Against Marriage* 22). Anthony Low has described this trend as a "georgic revolution" in eighteenth-century English literature, *The Georgic Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).



inhabitants of her community will transform into actual shepherds, she does want their engagement with pastoral life to be more serious -- “moins folle” – than a staged scene:

Comme les personnes du monde se déguisent présentement et que cette façon de faire qui n'était point bienséante aux gens de condition d'autrefois s'est maintenant mise en usage, je ne désapprouverais point que parmi nous on prit aussi quelquefois ce divertissement mais d'une manière moins folle. Je voudrais que l'on allât garder les troupeaux de moutons dans ces belles prairies [...] et qu'on imitât quelquefois ce qu'on a lu dans *L'Astrée* sans toutefois faire l'amour, car cela ne me plaît point en quelque habit que ce soit. (30)

The residents of the republic will go beyond the superficial kind of pastoral imitation practiced at court. Montpensier's project also puts a critical distance between itself and romanesque depictions of rural life that deny material reality. In addition to tending sheep, members of the community will make cheese and milk cows, because, as Montpensier writes, “il faut manger et que je ne prétends pas que le plan de notre vie soit fabuleux comme ces Romans où l'on observe un jeune perpétuel” (32). The relations between the sexes are also to be dictated by a mixed model formed from picking and choosing certain elements from novels and from reality: “Je ne voudrais pas qu'ils en usassent tout a fait comme ces galants qui sont décrits dans les Romans, mais j'en voudrais quelque chose. Je prendrais de tout un peu pour perfectionner nos habitants de l'un et de l'autre sexe” (46). This evidence that Montpensier is engaging critically with literary models belies the notion that she suffers from Foucault's *folie par identification romanesque*. Her project for a pastoral republic is not the result of a quixotic desire to

live out *L'Astrée*, but a thoughtful combining of fiction and reality to construct an alternative life for women.

Montpensier's own experience of life in the country at Saint-Fargeau also serves as a model for the pastoral republic. She imagines that building, planting, reading and writing will be the principal pastimes, just as they were for her Saint-Fargeau. Living in an environment where they are no longer forced to bend their natural inclinations to the rules of *bienséance*, Montpensier predicts that many residents will produce literature as well as reading it: "Je ne doute point que nous n'eussions parmi nous des personnes qui mettraient aussi quelques ouvrages en lumière chacun selon son talent, puisqu'il n'y a personne qui n'en ait un tout à fait dissemblable quand on veut suivre son naturel" (30). In the undomesticated space of nature where women are at liberty to participate in the same intellectual and physical work as men, the unnatural character of cultural gender roles becomes visible.

In their plans for a pastoral republic where marriage will be forbidden, Montpensier and Motteville reject naturalized gender roles. As an institution that endorses the inferiority of women, marriage has no place in their community. In their discussion of gender hierarchy both correspondents argue that women are not inferior to men because of biology, but because of social custom that has been masquerading as nature. According to Montpensier, "ce qui a donné la supériorité aux hommes a été le mariage, et que ce qui nous a fait nommer le sexe fragile a été cette dépendance où l'usage nous a assujetties souvent contre notre volonté et par des raisons de famille dont nous avons été les victimes" (46). Motteville extends Montpensier's argument about the

unfounded nature of gender hierarchy within marriage, describing how men have unjustifiably claimed superiority over the natural world and all domains of knowledge.

Women are allowed mastery only over domestic duties:

ils usurpent sur nous le commandement de la mer et de la terre, les sciences, la valeur, la puissance, celle de juger et d'être les maîtres de la vie des humains, les dignités en toutes conditions, et, ôté la quenouille, je ne sais rien sous le Soleil qu'ils n'aient mis de leur côté; cependant leur tyrannie n'est fondée sur aucun juste prétexte. (50)

Citing several examples of women who have excelled as rulers, military leaders, and scientific thinkers, Motteville concludes that these activities cannot be legitimately understood as gendered. Any virtues that men are willing to attribute to women, such as chastity, are devalued because they are assumed to be natural, requiring no effort and thus unworthy of praise: "comme elle nous doit être facile à pratiquer ils prétendent aussi que nous en méritons peu de gloire" (52). Thus the correspondents' discussion of why marriage will be excluded from their pastoral community brings to light the multiple ways that women are excluded from the cultural realm based on their perceived proximity to nature.

Sainte-Beuve and Bertaud both cast Motteville as the voice of reason in this conversation and as the person who gives a coherent shape to Montpensier's unruly "bouillonnement d'idées" (Bertaud, "En Marge" 294).<sup>53</sup> For Bertaud, Montpensier's

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<sup>53</sup> In her review of DeJean's edition of the correspondence, Zanger has critiqued the secondary status it gives to Motteville's voice. She identifies Motteville's objections to certain aspects of Montpensier's plan as a particularly significant contribution to the

mixing of real life and fiction in her vision of her republic results from a disconnection with reality. In contrast to Motteville's stable clarity, Montpensier is "tentée par le chimérique, l'excessif, et par toutes les formes d'héroïsme" ("En Marge" 294). Most of Motteville's objections to the project as formulated by Montpensier can be seen as calls for verisimilitude, to which Montpensier responds by asserting her authority to redefine the limits of what is acceptable and realistic, what is *bienséant* and *vraisemblant*.

Through the back and forth between the two correspondents, principally about the likelihood that marriage could realistically be excluded from their republic, we can see how nature provides a context that lends credibility to her project. To Motteville's suggestion that romance and marriage are a part of human nature that Montpensier might not be able to overrule, Montpensier responds that their project is realistic both because of the power of her example and because of the placeness of their community. In the geographically well-defined space of their republic, at a distance from, but not out of sight of, the corruption at court, residents will be able to see the gap between what is natural, and what passes for natural in public opinion. In this place, Montpensier's own rejection of domestic life would be a powerful example to her subjects:

n'aurais-je pas lieu de croire que l'autorité du mien pourrait détruire dans nos déserts cette erreur qui s'est tournée en bienséance? Mon Empire se bornerait là, c'est pourquoi personne n'aurait droit de murmurer contre moi-même. (42)

In this passage, the viability of a life without marriage is directly linked to the pastoral context.

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project, "Rev. of *Against Marriage: The Correspondence of La Grande Mademoiselle*, Ed. Joan DeJean, *Renaissance Quarterly* 57.3 (2004): 1025-1027.

Montpensier's final letter to Motteville collapses the distinction between the place of their pastoral republic and Montpensier's real-life location. In this letter she describes the failure of a potential marriage arrangement that would have threatened her ability to continue their project, to "continuer dans le dessein que nous avions fait" (62). Writing from a spa Forges-les-Eaux, she likens the bucolic setting to that of their pastoral community. She informs Motteville that she is already living as if she were in their pastoral republic, reading, writing, and socializing: "je fais presque ce que je ferais si nous étions déjà dans notre retraite" (68). After the threat of marriage has cleared, Montpensier feels that their project is more possible than it has ever been: "je passe mes plus agréables heures à rêver à notre dessin, à louer Dieu de ce que les obstacles qui s'y pouvaient opposer par le passé sont enfin levés et ne m'en laissent point prévoir à l'avenir" (68). For Montpensier, the life that she and Motteville have imagined can occupy a place in her thoughts that is no less tangible than its location in geography.

The final letter in this communication reaffirms the tension that runs through the whole correspondence between the practice of pastoral living and the ideal, between its status as 'blueprint' and 'mere wish fulfillment.' It is a story sent by Motteville that recounts the life of the Persian Princess Adamirze, who is strikingly similar to Montpensier. Motteville cites this resemblance as her main motivation in bringing this story to Montpensier's attention. According to Motteville, the story of princess Adamirze has made its way from Persia to France "que pour nous venir apprendre que vous n'êtes pas la première qui ait désiré vivre dans les bois" (*Lettres* 30). While Motteville depicts the existence of this like-minded person as a validation of Montpensier's desire for a life

in retreat, she draws attention to one crucial difference between the two women: “elle a pratiqué ce que Votre Altesse Royale a écrit si souvent qu’il falloit faire” (30). Like Montpensier, this princess was poised to attain great power through marriage, but she chose solitude over the “gloire éclatante” of life at court.

The story takes place on the island of Imbre, situated, like Montpensier’s republic, close enough to the city (Constantinople) to maintain connections with those living in the outside world, but far enough away from court to avoid its intrigues. The island has all the qualities of a pastoral utopia; sheep graze in beautiful pastures, and food grows in abundance. All the inhabitants build their own homes, “selon leur fantaisie.” This republic, like Montpensier’s, is located in between the hard realities of rural living and fantasies of pastoral leisure. Work, whether intellectual or physical, occupies everyone. The island’s philosophers, although they dislike hard labor, still tend sheep, an occupation especially enjoyed by women, “mais elles ne le font que dans les belles saisons et les jours que les beautés de la campagne les convient à la promenade” (62). Adamirze grows up to be a strong, striking woman, an “amazon” who adores hunting and reading. Most of the women of the island follow princess Adamirze’s example and reject marriage, but those who do marry do so only by choice. The story ends with the princess refusing an offer of marriage from the emperor, declaring that she would rather have complete sovereignty over herself and her modest island than over an entire empire.

The story of princess Adamirze is in many ways a perfect example of the kind of pastoral elaborated in Montpensier’s works. The geographic situation and landscape of the idyllic island of Imbre are well defined, and its residents maintain a controlled

relationship with the outside world. Though it is not a place for romance and idleness, its residents are not completely unsusceptible to love, and have no need for hard labor. The central pleasure of this pastoral paradise is the degree of freedom it offers relative to life at court. A great deal of political power is sacrificed to keep control over this more modest domain. However, although the story sent by Motteville presents pastoral retreat as a virtuous and enviable way of life, it is also presented as unsustainable. From the “translator’s” notes at the end of the story, we learn that the idyllic lifestyle of this pastoral republic could not withstand the pressures of the outside world and was eventually brought to an end by “l’invasion des Mahometans et l’établissement de la monarchie des Turcs à Constantinople” (142). All that is left of Adamirze’s society are a few remnants of a lost golden age. The framing of this story with the difference between Montpensier’s writing and Adamirze’s lived experience, along with the ultimate relegation of the pastoral to a lost golden age, denies the pastoral’s capacity to intervene in the contemporary.

Montpensier and Motteville’s *république champêtre* uses the undomesticated place of nature to strengthen their vision of an alternative society. The pastoral creates a frame in which it becomes feasible that a woman builds, writes, and controls her destiny. The ways in which this pastoral republic sets itself apart from pastoral and novelistic conventions of the period reveal a post-pastoral awareness of the potential traps of romanticized nature. The same kind of awareness is evident in the next text to be considered, although it is put into practice to achieve a completely different goal.

### **Sovereign Dreams: *La Relation de l'Isle Imaginaire***

We have seen how Montpensier invests her pastoral texts with a sense of place, so that the pastoral context lends power to her rewriting of nature/culture and male/female relationships. The final text that I consider in this chapter demonstrates a post-pastoral awareness of how the pastoral trap of romanticized, unlocatable nature functions to undermine power. I have argued that the *Nouvelles Françaises* and the pastoral republic developed in the correspondence with Motteville are post-pastoral in that they employ strategies that allow them to move beyond this trap. In contrast, Montpensier's *Relation de l'Isle Imaginaire* intentionally embraces the trope of excessively idealized nature in order to mock pastoral convention and her reader. In contrast to the well-established geographic and ideological landscape of Montpensier's other pastoral lands, the *île imaginaire* is a non-place that functions not only as a critique of pastoral convention, but as a satire of a man with delusions of grandeur. Montpensier describes the context surrounding the creation of the *Relation* in her memoirs. It is useful to our understanding of the text to begin with a discussion of the circumstances that inspired its creation.

Montpensier traveled with the court to Lyon in the fall of 1658, and on this occasion she was given permission to pay a visit to nearby Dombes, an enclave of independent territory within France over which Montpensier was sovereign princess. It was during her stay in the Dombes, a territory in which she outranked even the king of France, that she composed the *Relation*. Montpensier's record of the events of this visit in her memoirs is filled with accounts of various manifestations of her sovereignty. When she orders the parliament of the Dombes to travel to Lyon in order to honor and welcome



Louis XIV, she notes that the members of her parliament do not kneel in front of the French king. The refusal to kneel demonstrates that they are Montpensier's subjects and thus not under the power of the king (2:90). While they do not kneel, they nonetheless offer welcome speeches to each member of the French court. Montpensier includes these speeches in her memoirs because she is certain that they will not be recorded elsewhere, and she feels that these examples of the greatness of her parliament should not be forgotten. Running through each of these speeches addressed to the king, the queen, and cardinal Richelieu is an affirmation of Montpensier's sovereignty over the territory: "Cette compagnie, qui a l'honneur d'une attribution souveraine en Dombes, sous les auspices de Mademoiselle, vient par ses ordres rendre à Votre Majesté ses très humbles respects" (2:91). Shortly after the ceremony in Lyon, Montpensier visits the capital of the principality, Trévoux. During her visit she engages in several exercises of her sovereignty, pardoning prisoners, creating new offices in the parliament, and, upon discovering that prayers were said for her health but not for the king's, ordering that he be acknowledged during mass as well. She also purchases a home that offers her the perfect vantage point from which to view the domain over which she rules: "ainsi, quelque bonne que l'on ait la vue, on ne sauroit regarder que mes terres. Le paysage en est le plus agréable du monde: il n'y a point de peintre qui en puisse faire un plus beau" (2:94). Montpensier's account of her time in the Dombes is a record of the power she experiences in this place. This record, however, has been rendered suspect by critics who accuse Montpensier of infusing heroic romance into her autobiography.<sup>54</sup> For Garapon,

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<sup>54</sup> For a critique of this representation of Montpensier's writing, see Steven Shapiro, "The

Montpensier's account of her sovereignty cannot be considered historical because it is 'contaminated' with fictional elements:

Mademoiselle va visiter sa Souveraineté avec un mélange caractéristique de gravité et de détachement souriant, en laissant sa mythologie personnelle s'épancher en liberté dans l'existence réelle, puis contaminer discrètement à quelques années de là le récit qu'elle donne de ces journées. ("Grande Mademoiselle en visite" 489-490)

Garapon's characterization of Montpensier's account as self-aggrandizing suppresses the story of the practice of power contained in her narrative. Garapon links Montpensier's tendency to mix fiction and reality to her uncritical appreciation of pastoral literature. It is through the obscuring lens of pastoral romance that Montpensier appreciates the landscape of Trévoux, superimposing images from *L'Astrée* onto reality: "Mademoiselle ne se lasse pas de dire la beauté des Dombes, beauté mêlée de souvenirs pastoraux de cette lectrice de *L'Astrée*" ("Grande Mademoiselle en visite" 492). The invocation of the timelessness and nostalgia of conventional pastoral create the impression that Montpensier's power is merely a dream. In the same way, Garapon's understanding of Montpensier as uncritically embracing pastoral tradition leads to his misreading of the *Relation de l'isle imaginaire*. As he understands the pastoral to be a place outside of the political and the historical, he reads the *Relation* as a demonstration of Montpensier's renouncement of the political world:

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Romance of the Fronde: The Siege of Orleans in the *Mémoires* of Mademoiselle de Montpensier," *Romance Studies*, 28.1 (2010): 17-26.

On devine chez l'auteur cette hantise d'un âge d'or, d'un paradis pastoral qui imprégnera plus loin la description de l'île, loin du monde et du bruit [...]  
 Mademoiselle, si heureuse jadis de jouer un rôle politique, rêve à présent d'un retour aux origines, loin de l'Histoire et de ses fureurs. ("Grande Mademoiselle en visite" 496)

However, when we attend to the post-pastoral critique of pastoral convention performed by the *Relation*, the political nature of the text emerges. Montpensier creates an imaginary island that is idyllic and timeless, but the lack of placeness accorded to this pastoral world is intentional, and political.

In the preface to the *Relation*, Montpensier reveals that the story is inspired by an irritating parliamentarian whom she encountered during her stay in Trévoux. This man's exaggerated idea of the importance of his post had led him to importune Montpensier on many occasions, until she decided to put him back in his place with a joke. Montpensier does not deign to name the gentleman in the preface, implying that this identification would bestow too much honor upon a "no one": "Il est bon d'expliquer ce que c'est que le personnage à qui on adresse la relation de l'isle: car assurément c'est quelque chose de trop joli pour un nom aussi inconnu que le sien" (4).<sup>55</sup> She informs the man later identified as M. de Messimieux that she is about to purchase an island, and that she would like him to serve as its governor. His enthusiastic reaction to this proposition inspires Montpensier to take the joke to another level by creating a description of the

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<sup>55</sup> In her discussion of the term "no-man's land," DeJean raises the relationship between the absence of name and the denial of place. A family name is a "dual spatial indicator—indicator of place in a genealogy and indication of the ownership of land," ("No Man's Land" 179).

place that he will govern: “voyant la continuation de sa curiosité, et combien il prenoit la chose à coeur, au lieu que je croyois borner ce divertissement par une conversation, je trouvai qu’il me donnoit l’occasion de la pousser plus loin, et je lui dis que j’attendois cette relation au premier ordinaire” (6). Montpensier’s description of the fantastical imaginary island embraces all of the traps of pastoral convention. This provides her with the perfect tool to mock both conventional pastoral and Messimieux’s pretension to power.<sup>56</sup>

In Marie-Christine Pioffet’s discussion of seventeenth-century “lieux imaginaires,” she describes how these texts actively resist location, refusing placeness through a “derealisation” of the landscape: “La déréalisation du décor émane de la localisation évasive voire impossible du lieu” (339).<sup>57</sup> As the *Relation* opens, the reader is denied precise geographic coordinates of the island; the narrator gives information only about where it is *not*: “L’isle dont je veux vous parler n’est ni au nord ni au midi” (13). Adding to the impression of unlocatability, the narrator begins by recounting the dizzying series of adventures that brought him to the *île imaginaire*. Along the journey, the narrator assumes multiple identities, including that of a shepherd. The pastoral lifestyle is a costume that he slips on temporarily in order to win the love of a shepherdess. The

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<sup>56</sup> The *Relation* has also been read as a critique of the stylistic excess of the seventeenth-century novel. In his notes to the 1806 edition of the *Relation*, Renouard praises Montpensier’s work as a “courageous” attack on the novelistic conventions of the period: “dans cette espèce de débauche d’imagination, elle a voulu, en accumulant avec excès les descriptions exagérées des magnificences de la nature et de l’art [...] faire ressortir le ridicule des descriptions de ce genre qui remplissent les interminables et soporifiques romans françois lus de son temps” (vii).

<sup>57</sup> For a more in-depth analysis of the trope of the imaginary island in seventeenth-century literature, see Marie-Christine Pioffet’s “Pour une sémiologie du lieu imaginaire au XVIIe siècle: figures et significations,” *Dix-septième siècle* 2 (2010): 335-353.

artificiality of this life comes through in his description of the days spent with his beloved in a romanticized vision of rural life: “J’allois tous les jours mener mes moutons aux champs avec ma belle bergère: nous chantions assis sur l’herbe; nous faisons des chapeaux de fleurs à nos moutons les mieux aimés, je leur mettois des rubans” (29). Eventually the two lovers move to the Lignon river, the setting of d’Urfé’s *L’Astrée*, where they undertake a quixotic retracing of the steps of Céladon and Astrée until their romance ends in tragedy with the death of the shepherdess. The pastoral appears in the *Relation* as a false pretext for seduction, a setting totally devoid of any sense of place.

Based on the narrator’s extensive study of the island, he offers advice to the future governor Messimieux about how to proceed in populating and cultivating this untouched world. The island is a pastoral paradise with a mild climate, fertile soil and a dazzling array of plant and animal life. The list of creatures that live on the island includes several signature inhabitants of conventional pastorals -- satyrs and naiades, unicorns and sylphs -- creatures that are notably absent from Montpensier’s other pastoral works. The process of community building that is so central to Montpensier’s conception of the pastoral is a part of the *Relation*, but it occurs without the same careful selectivity. The narrator’s recommendation for who should be gathered to populate the island includes a random mix of people from different social classes and different religious backgrounds:

Amenez d’honnêtes gens pour peupler l’isle, des bourgeois des gentilshommes, et des gens d’église, car il faut que la vigne du Seigneur y soit cultivée aussi bien que le reste; des religieux et des religieuses, entre autres des jésuites [...] Si vous

voulez envoyez-y des jansénistes; ils sont laborieux et ne songent pas seulement au travail de l'esprit. (50)

This careless assembly of inhabitants and the sarcastic description of each member's potential contribution to the community contrasts sharply with Montpensier's plans to populate her pastoral republic.

In Garapon's discussion of the *Relation*, the criticism of pastoral convention that permeates the text is omitted in order to privilege the thesis that it represents a retreat into the imaginary: "La romancière, animée d'une intention parodique mais jouant surtout avec son propre esprit d'enfance, nous offre des épisodes marins, un rêve à la d'Urfé, qui en dit long sur la toute puissance de l'esprit pastoral et utopique chez elle pendant toutes ces années" (*Culture* 224). The failure to recognize the distinction between the way in which Montpensier uses the pastoral in the *Relation* versus her other pastoral texts results in a misreading. This text demonstrates Montpensier's post-pastoral awareness of pastoral's potential traps, and her ability to manipulate pastoral convention to meet her needs. The *Relation* is designed to put Messimieux back in his place, and it does so by describing a kind of pastoral land that is absurdly far from reality. Writing from a place where she had just experienced her own power, Montpensier demonstrates the illusory nature of Messimieux's pretension to rule the island. This utopia is more of a non-place than any others she imagines, and as a result, the pastoral context has the effect of denying power instead of reinforcing it.

## **Conclusion**

We began this chapter with a consideration of how certain political and scientific discourses have excluded women based on their perceived proximity to nature. While much feminist work has sought to extricate women from nature in order to assert their place in culture, ecofeminists have called attention to the problematic nature/culture dualism that persists in this thinking. Rather than disconnecting women from nature, ecofeminist strategies have involved destabilizing the border between the natural and the cultural, the feminine and the masculine, demonstrating that these categories are not oppositional. Without arguing that a woman's place is in nature, critics like Alaimo have suggested that nature can serve as an empowering base for feminist activity.

As a literary mode that is associated with nature, critics often read the pastoral as apolitical, thus locating it outside of the cultural sphere. I have suggested that the perceived ineffectuality of the pastoral stems from its location outside of time and concrete place. The undervaluing of the pastoral as a literary mode, in line with the undervaluing of nature in relation to culture, has masked the potential of the pastoral to participate in the political world. Gifford's theory of the post-pastoral rehabilitates the political potential of pastoral literature by identifying texts that move beyond the idealizing traps of pastoral convention. Using the post-pastoral in my readings of Montpensier's texts, I have tried to identify how she recuperates nature as a site on which to construct a strong female subjectivity.

Gifford's first elaboration of his theory listed six criteria that could be employed to identify post-pastoral texts. In later formulations of this theory, Gifford transformed each of these criteria into a question. To conclude this chapter, I would like to look at

three of these questions that I identified in the introduction as most relevant to a discussion of women writing pastoral, and summarize the ways in which my readings of Montpensier's texts have addressed these questions: How can we learn to understand our inner nature by feeling its continuum with the outer? What does it mean to say that nature is culture and our culture is nature? How can we best address the insight of ecofeminism that the exploitation of the planet is linked to the exploitation of people?<sup>58</sup>

We have seen how the "outer nature" of place is connected to Montpensier's rearticulation of women's "inner nature," a rearticulation which allows her to redefine women's place in society. The articulation of a strong female subject is bound up in the articulation of nature's status as a subject with agency. What Montpensier learned from her direct experience with rural living during her exile fostered her identity as an author. Through the space-altering activities of building and landscaping a residence, and constructing a court in exile at Saint-Fargeau, Montpensier developed a relationship with the land. From this work emerged a sense of self inextricably linked to a sense of place. The visibility of Montpensier's working relationship with the land also disrupts the notion that women can be conflated with nature. The connection between a sense of place and a sense of self that is established in Montpensier's memoirs continues to inform her pastoral fiction. We have discussed the *Nouvelles françaises*' foregrounding of feminine and natural subjects. Despite its status as a partly fictionalized account of Montpensier's

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<sup>58</sup> Slightly different versions of these six questions appear in Gifford's articles and books. The formulation given here is from Gifford's article "Terrain, character and text: is *Cold Mountain* by Charles Frazier a post-pastoral novel?," *Mississippi Quarterly* 25 (Winter 2001): 87-96. I have chosen this version because I feel it best highlights how Gifford sees the relationship between pastoral literature and ecofeminist concerns.



time at Saint-Fargeau, the *Nouvelles* retains a sense of place from which a powerful female subjectivity emerges. In the same way, the pastoral republic imagined by Motteville and Montpensier in their correspondence draws power from its pastoral context.

Readings of Montpensier's pastoral also give us a clearer idea of the role that literature can play in imagining a non-dualistic relationship between nature and culture. I have traced the ways in which Montpensier's pastoral destabilizes the nature/culture dualism, and the associated female/male, object/subject dualisms. Montpensier writes against a notion of nature as a background to the action of culture. In her memoirs and in her pastoral fiction she describes nature as a place that fosters cultural production such as building, reading and writing. Since societal gender norms define women as passive and idle in opposition to active working men, the depiction of women's work breaks down this female/male dualism. The work of writing and self-cultivation emerges as a "coproduction" of women and the natural world, a process that recognizes women and nature as subjects.

Finally, a consideration of Montpensier's pastoral reveals the importance of looking at the connection between the value accorded to women and that accorded to nature. It is through this issue that a consideration of early-modern women's pastoral writing has the most to contribute to the expansion of post-pastoral theory. Thus far Gifford's theory has been most frequently applied to contemporary texts, with the goal of investigating literature's power to repair the fractured human-nature relationship seen to be at the root of environmental destruction. When this theory has been applied to pre-

twentieth-century texts, it has focused on male nature writers, almost exclusively from the British, American, and Australian traditions. Montpensier's work demonstrates that the subversive potential of pastoral literature was deployed even in a period often seen to represent the apogee of classic pastoral. It also suggests how the post-pastoral opens up new territory for representing women's power beyond the confines of the salon, in line with the work of critics such as Cherbuliez and Alaimo. When nature is no longer marginalized in relation to culture, it becomes possible to see how it can serve as a powerful site on which to ground women's power.

Building on Montpensier's redefinition of the pastoral as a literary mode that infuses rural work into a traditionally idyllic nature, chapter two will examine how labor is central to seventeenth-century debate over pastoral aesthetics. Continuing my exploration of how early-modern pastoral contributes to the articulation of the post-pastoral, I turn to the work of another author and theorizer of pastoral literature, Bernard le Bouvier de Fontenelle. Fontenelle's work addresses the tension that emerges in this period between two different notions of the kind of place that pastoral literature should represent. The inclusion of rural work is a key point of dispute between partisans of a more idyllic representation of life in nature, and those who call for pastoral literature to better reflect rural reality. Like Montpensier, Fontenelle uses the pastoral to imagine alternatives to social norms, and to break down dualistic relationships between culture and nature, work and leisure, the masculine and the feminine. While attending to existing aesthetic and generic limits of literary representation, and social limits imposed according to class and gender, Fontenelle carefully pushes the boundaries of what can be considered

pastoral, and also consequently what can be considered *bienséant* or *vraisemblant* for its characters.

Like Montpensier, Fontenelle has been misread because of his association with a devalued pastoral literature. That such a forward-thinking author as Fontenelle wrote pastoral literature at all has disturbed generations of literary critics unable to reconcile the world of the pastoral and the 'modern' world that science seeks to reveal and resolve. My reading of how critical literature has dealt with Fontenelle's status as both a scientific and a literary figure suggests that interdisciplinary ventures such as ecocriticism that attempt to bring science and literature together need to be attentive to the gendered values attached to these disciplines.

## Chapter Two

### Fontenelle's Post-Pastoral Interdisciplinarity: Knowing Nature through Science and Literature

Le normand Fontenelle, au milieu de Paris,  
 Prêta des agréments au chalumeau champêtre;  
 Mais il vantait des soins qu'il craignait de connaître,  
 Et de ses faux bergers il fit de beaux esprits.  
 -- Voltaire, "Épître à Mme Denis sur l'agriculture"

The work of Bernard le Bouvier de Fontenelle (1657-1757), one of the major theorists and authors of pastoral literature in early modern France, questions the extent to which literary representations of nature should be responsible for reflecting the realities of rural life. For Fontenelle, liberating pastoral literature from the constraints of strict verisimilitude is an important part of creating a 'modern' pastoral that engages with contemporary political and intellectual currents. While contemporaries such as Voltaire, along with later critics, find that Fontenelle abandons his responsibility towards the people and places traditionally treated in pastoral literature, I argue in this chapter that Fontenelle's pastoral proposes a complex way of knowing and writing nature. In the previous chapter's discussion of Montpensier's post-pastoral literature, we saw how a literary mode that putatively functions as an escape from reality is mobilized to subvert oppressive social hierarchies. For Montpensier, pastoral literature is a place to imagine

future possibilities for women, and a way to expose the artificiality of restrictive gender roles supposedly rooted in nature. For Montpensier, and for Fontenelle (as well as for Rousseau, as we shall see in the following chapter), the pastoral is fundamentally a forward-looking literary mode. It escapes the traps of conventional pastoral by giving center stage to tensions inherent in this literary mode, namely the tension between nature as it exists in the literary imaginary, and nature as it is known through everyday experience and scientific observation.

Fontenelle is well known to scholars of the early modern period as a supporter of the moderns in the *querelle des anciens et des modernes* that divided the *Académie française* during the second half of the seventeenth century into the eighteenth century.<sup>59</sup> The *querelle* is generally seen to have begun in 1687, when Perrault presents his poem *Siècle de Louis le Grand* to the *Académie française*, followed by the publication in 1688 of his *Parallèle des Anciens et des Modernes en ce qui regarde les arts et les sciences*. Perrault includes a poem to Fontenelle in his *Parallèle*, criticizing the vulgarity of Theocritus, praising Fontenelle's modern pastoral style. Ancients believed that the cultural productions of classical antiquity could never be surpassed, and that contemporary thinkers, writers and artists should endeavor to imitate ancient models as faithfully as possible, while Moderns believed in the capacity of contemporary works to surpass ancient models. Fontenelle's official entry into this debate, the *Digression sur les Anciens et les Modernes*, is published as an "apology" for his attack on ancient pastoral

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<sup>59</sup> See Larry F. Norman, *The Shock of the Ancient: Literature and History in Early Modern France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), and Joan DeJean, *Ancients Against Moderns: Culture Wars and the Making of a Fin de Siècle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

conventions in his *Discours sur la Nature de l'Églogue*, and for the shocking model of modern pastoral he proposes in his *Poésies Pastorales*. All three of these texts originally appear together in 1688, a response to the Ancients' conception of the pastoral mode, provoked in particular by Hilaire Bernard de Longepierre's translation of ancient Greek poets Bion and Moschus in 1686. In his *Discours*, Fontenelle criticizes the ancient writers generally accepted to be the founders of the pastoral, and he attributes the faults of some contemporary pastorals to an overly strict adherence to these models and a failure to see how this literary mode must be adapted to current tastes. Aware that his attacks on the much-revered classical writers Virgil and Theocritus would stir up significant controversy, Fontenelle declares that he will follow his *Discours* with further explanation in the form of "une petite digression qui sera mon apologie" (409). Instead of basing his argument in the *Digression* on the quality of ancient texts compared with that of modern texts, Fontenelle's defense of his modern pastoral, and his more general argument against the superiority of the cultural productions of classical antiquity, is based on nature: "Toute la question de la prééminence entre les Anciens et les Modernes étant une fois bien entendue, se réduit à savoir si les arbres qui étaient autrefois dans nos campagnes étaient plus grands que ceux d'aujourd'hui" (413). He reasons that since human nature, including human brain matter, is in essence composed of the same material as external nature, Ancient thinkers would be superior to Moderns only if the nature of the ancient world was particularly "young and vigorous." Fontenelle argues that there is no reason to idealize the idyllic nature or the great minds of the past. Scientific knowledge of the

natural world does not support the hypothesis that ancient trees were taller, or that ancient writers were extraordinarily gifted:

La Nature a entre les mains une certaine pâte qui est toujours la même, qu'elle tourne et retourne sans cesse en mille façons, et dont elle forme les hommes, les animaux, les plantes; et certainement elle n'a point formé Platon, Démosthène ni Homère d'une argile plus fine ni mieux préparée que nos Philosophes, nos Orateurs et nos Poètes d'aujourd'hui. (414)

Nostalgia for a golden age of intellectual activity, just like nostalgia for a lost Arcadia, impairs the ability of contemporary thinkers to engage with the present. The decidedly unapologetic statement of the broader case for the Moderns comes to an end with Fontenelle reaffirming the central criteria that should set modern pastoral apart from ancient; as his own eclogues demonstrate, it is a literary mode that is not intended to approximate the actual conditions of rural life. Instead, the nature of modern pastoral is the product of the literary imagination, which creates the perfect textual environment in which to represent love. Fontenelle predicts that his contemporaries may not be ready for such a departure from pastoral as conceived by the ancients:

Si j'ai choqué les siècles passés par la critique des églogues des Anciens, je crains fort de ne plaire guère au siècle présent par les miennes. Outre beaucoup de défauts qu'elles ont, elles représentent toujours un amour tendre, délicat, appliqué, fidèle jusqu'à en être superstitieux; et selon tout ce que j'entends dire, le siècle est bien mal choisi pour y peindre un amour si parfait. (430)

Fontenelle puts seventeenth-century standards of verisimilitude into question, implying that his contemporaries might not be able to recognize an emotionally realistic portrait of true love, perhaps because they are too invested in a realistic rural aesthetic. Rather than recreating the nature of a lost Arcadia, Fontenelle uses the pastoral to reach verisimilitude in the depiction of inner nature, but this inner nature is connected to external nature.

That Fontenelle declares his ‘modernity’ by way of the pastoral has puzzled many critics, including Jean-Pierre Chauveau, who describes Fontenelle’s path into the *querelle* as “un détour curieux d’un genre poétique hautement conventionnel et qui pouvait paraître quelque peu suranné en 1688 [...] On peut se demander pourquoi le champion des Modernes s’est rabattu sur un genre dont les références les plus illustres sont antiques” (156).<sup>60</sup> Fontenelle’s reputation as a modern thinker also comes from his interest in science. Besides being the author of a great deal of prose and poetry and a member of the *Académie française*, he also served as the *Secrétaire perpétuel* of the *Académie royale des Sciences* beginning in 1697. His best known book, the *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes habités* (1686), combines pastoral literature with Cartesian and Copernican cosmology. Twenty-first century readers looking for the *Entretiens* in the library or the bookstore may find it categorized as science fiction, history of science, or French literature. In this text, a philosopher explains new scientific theories to a noblewoman over the course of six evenings of flirtatious conversation and leisurely strolls through the idyllic gardens of her country estate, and the two discuss the possibility of life on other

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<sup>60</sup> See Jean-Pierre Chauveau, “Fontenelle et la poésie,” in *Fontenelle: Actes du Colloque tenu à Rouen du 6 au 10 Octobre 1987* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1989) 151-163.



planets. It is the combination of the scientific way of knowing nature and the literary way of knowing nature that makes Fontenelle an important example of early modern post-pastoral. Before we consider the post-pastoral aspects of Fontenelle's pastoral theory, his pastoral poetry, and the *Entretiens*, it is important to take a brief look at nineteenth- and twentieth-century readers' attempts to categorize and explain what we would now call Fontenelle's "interdisciplinarity." The difficulty that so many critics have had in reconciling Fontenelle's modernity with his interest in pastoral demonstrates exactly why we need the term "post-pastoral" to understand the complex ways in which this literary mode has functioned throughout history. Writing about nature has come to be associated with a critique of modernity and a desire to return to a more "primitive" state. It is this characterization of the pastoral that leads Pierre Brunel, for example, in his discussion of Fontenelle, to question whether there can be such a thing as a "modern" eclogue: "Peut-on dire qu'il propose une conception moderne de l'idylle? Il faut l'avouer, l'entreprise serait paradoxale car, pour lui comme pour ses prédécesseurs, la poésie pastorale correspond à un âge premier de l'humanité, âge perdu à partir de la naissance des villes et des états" (138). Contrary to this assertion, Fontenelle's writing demonstrates that writing nature is not incompatible with the contemporary political world.

### **Reconciling "Two Fontenelles"**

That such a forward-thinking writer as Fontenelle would dabble in such a backward-looking literary mode as the pastoral, a kind of writing that was widely considered outdated even in his own time, has caused uneasiness in generations of

Fontenelle critics. This uneasiness is one potential explanation for why Fontenelle's use of the pastoral as a vehicle for his argument for the Moderns has not been attended to, because there is a perceived incompatibility between the world of the pastoral and the 'modern' world that science seeks to reveal and resolve. The nineteenth-century critic Sainte-Beuve identified a contradiction within Fontenelle's body of work that many subsequent critics have taken as the point of departure for their own studies. Sainte-Beuve expresses difficulty in reconciling what he refers to as "deux Fontenelles très distincts" represented on the one hand by the "fade auteur d'églogues et d'opéras, rédacteur du *Mercure Galant*," who is "primitif, à l'esprit mince, au goût détestable," as opposed to the author of the *Entretiens*, "comprenant le monde moderne [...] le Fontenelle non plus des ruelles ni de l'Opéra, mais de l'Académie des sciences" (314-15).<sup>61</sup> Fontenelle's scientific work is directly opposed to the backward-looking nostalgia associated with pastoral literature. In turn, the pastoral is associated with the feminine spaces of the *ruelle*, the opera, and the pages of the *Mercure Galant*, which Fontenelle "leaves behind" for the masculine space of the *Académie des Sciences*. The difficulty seems to come not so much in accepting that these two Fontenelles exist, but in accepting that they exist at the same time in his literary career and occupy the same space. It would be much more comfortable to say that Fontenelle gradually evolved into an increasingly "serious" author, but Fontenelle's pastoral poetry came *after* the *Entretiens sur la*

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<sup>61</sup> The *Mercure Galant*, founded in 1672 by Donneau de Visé, was a periodical that featured coverage on current social and literary events, whose primary audience was women. Fontenelle's uncle Thomas Corneille edited the publication along with Donneau de Visé. Fontenelle's first literary works, primarily poems, were published in the *Mercure*.

*Pluralité des Mondes*. His literary career is marked by regular moves between genres that have now been separated by the disciplinary and gendered boundaries of science and literature. For those critics who want to establish an evolution in Fontenelle's work--who, like early twentieth-century critic Louis Maignon, wish to demonstrate "comment du simple bel esprit le grand esprit s'est enfin dégagé par une ascension lente, mais sûre"-- it is highly inconvenient that Fontenelle's pastoral works came after the *Entretiens* (iii). Maignon's statement of frustration with what he sees as inconsistency is one often quoted in Fontenelle studies: "Il n'a pas craint d'écrire des *Lettres galantes* après ses *Dialogues*, et il a eu le mauvais goût de publier des *Pastorales* après son *Histoire des Oracles*, laissant ainsi frivole et sérieux alterner dans ses livres avec la plus facheuse régularité" (iii).

Critics have dealt with the co-existence of scientific work and pastoral leisure in Fontenelle's body of work by dividing his texts into categories of politically versus personally motivated writing. It is interesting to note that some of the same trends found in critical writing about Montpensier's pastoral are also present in Fontenelle criticism-- namely, the coding of pastoral as feminine, frivolous, and inextricably linked to biography. Fontenelle's interest in the pastoral mode is consistently explained away as being rooted in the personal. While a discussion of Fontenelle's personal experience with nature can certainly contribute to our understanding of his pastoral literature, the kind of narrative that has emerged so far -- one in which the idea of nature coaxes the author into a romanticized unreality -- reinscribes nature/culture and feminine/masculine dichotomies. Critical readings of Fontenelle's *Poésies Pastorales* usually take these

poems to be a tribute to Mme de la Mésangère, the woman with whom he is meant to have fallen in love during the time he spent at her country estate, and the woman commonly thought to have inspired the character of the Marquise in the *Entretiens*. In nineteenth-century novelist Arsène Houssaye's account of how Fontenelle's affection for Mme de la Mésangère pushed him towards the pastoral, bucolic leisure combines with feminine sentiment to induce unmanly self-delusion: "à force de se promener avec elle et de la voir pleurer, il s'imagina qu'il devenait amoureux [...] Il imita les bergers" (quoted in Brunel 143). Fontenelle's interest in the pastoral is also attributed to his supposed life-long desire to inhabit the idyllic world of the hugely popular seventeenth-century pastoral novel *L'Astrée*. Critics find evidence for this dream in Fontenelle's admiration for the author Honoré d'Urfé and his novel.<sup>62</sup> Both the *Poésies* and the *Entretiens* are littered with references to this multi-volume work first published in 1601, whose author set the standard for modern pastoral by announcing in the opening pages that the natural environment and its inhabitants represented in the pages of the novel do not correspond to any physical reality.

When critical readings of Fontenelle's pastoral use biography to romanticize the relationship between the author and nature, and to cast this type of writing as an outlet for his less scientific, more romantic side, important aspects of the pastoral are left unexplored. By contrast, Alain Niderst, one of the foremost figures in twentieth-century

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<sup>62</sup> Louis Maigron finds it paradoxical that the literary tastes of a man so ahead of his time in scientific thinking should be so outdated. He attributes this in part to Fontenelle's provincial origins: "parce que la province retarde toujours, il parlera encore, aux environs de 1680, comme un contemporain de d'Urfé," see *Fontenelle: L'homme, l'oeuvre, l'influence* (Paris: Slatkine, 1906) 121.

Fontenelle studies, sees the pastoral as an important unifying element throughout Fontenelle's literary career, and he argues against dismissing Fontenelle's pastoral as being merely escapist. For Niderst, the pastoral is a notion that ties together the scientific and the literary works of Fontenelle: "Ce rêve pastoral n'est pas une évasion éphémère; c'est peut-être l'aspiration la plus profonde de Fontenelle. Toutes ses oeuvres, jusqu'aux recherches et aux vulgarisations scientifiques, peuvent s'expliquer par la persistance d'un idéal" (*A la recherche* 195). But while Niderst demonstrates the need to complicate our understanding of Fontenelle's use of the pastoral, it still remains for him the product of a completely personal dream of the return of the golden age: "Le terme pastorale évoque en notre esprit des idées d'artifice ou de convention. Nous avons peut-être tort: Fontenelle ne visait évidemment pas à évoquer la vie des véritables bergers; c'étaient ses propres sentiments parés par la Fable, transportés dans une atmosphère insouciant et paisible, qu'il voulait nous confier" (262). My readings of Fontenelle suggest that his pastoral literature cannot be reduced to the fulfillment of a personal desire for escape into an idealized past. Rather, it represents a confrontation with contemporary issues. Fontenelle's work stages a post-pastoral dialogue between humanistic and scientific ways of knowing nature, and in this way it is relevant to twenty-first century ecocriticism.

### **Literature and Science in Ecocritical Conversation**

A discussion of Fontenelle's work is particularly relevant to ecocriticism's struggle to bring science and literature together in a genuinely interdisciplinary way. Fontenelle provides a model for the way in which we can conceive of science and

literature as more equal partners in a dialogue, rather than seeing literature as striving to match scientific ‘truth.’ His work demonstrates how the literary imaginary provides a way of knowing nature that is no less valid than a scientific way of knowing the world. Historian of science J.B. Shank notes that in Fontenelle’s writing, “physics, pleasure, reason and the imagination are not at odds with one another, but are mutually reinforcing” (102). Writing about the twenty-first century pedagogical potential in the *Entretiens*, Juliette Cherbuliez has stressed how Fontenelle’s career and his body of work can remind us to “think in a predisciplinary manner” when discussing the early modern period (“Ways of Knowing” 117). Being conscious of the lack of disciplinary separation between literature and science, imagination and reason, not only keeps us from misreading early modern texts like the *Entretiens*, but it can help us to get beyond contemporary obstacles to interdisciplinarity. Michel Serres, editor of the most recent edition of Fontenelle’s complete works, mourns modern academia’s loss of the early modern connection between the humanities and the sciences that made Fontenelle’s career possible:

Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle, a member of both the *Académie Française* and the *Académie des Sciences*, thinks and invents without making a distinction, as we unfortunately do, between culture strictly limited by an ignorance of the sciences, and science limited by its lack of culture. In Fontenelle there is a marriage

between subtlety and geometry. Although we are descendents of this union, we reject its lesson. (57-58)<sup>63</sup>

Recovering what Shank has called the “the lost social and political possibilities” that we can access through Fontenelle provides a valuable model for how science and literature might speak to each other in ecocritical theory.<sup>64</sup>

Turning to this moment in history is useful to environmental critics, particularly ecofeminist critics, who wish explore the historical connection between gender, nature, and science. As scholars such as Cherbuliez and Shank have noted, reading Fontenelle gives us a glimpse into the relationship between women and science in early-modern France, and the subsequent gendering of scientific and literary disciplines. Cherbuliez uses Fontenelle to discuss the end of the seventeenth-century as “a moment of possibility, however fleeting or interrupted, for women and their relation to social change, knowledge and hierarchy” (“Ways of Knowing” 110). Looking at the relationships between women and science, and between the humanistic and the scientific, that were possible in this period reveals how gender-coded ways of knowing inform our current understanding of disciplinary divisions. In interdisciplinary ventures such as ecocriticism, the literary, and particularly a literary mode such as the pastoral, is coded as feminine, passive and devalued in relation to rational, objective masculine science. By reminding us that in

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<sup>63</sup> In the first chapter of his *Science and Humanism in the French Enlightenment* (Charlottesville: Rookwood Press, 1999), Aram Vartanian also speaks of Fontenelle as a personification of “the original nexus of the sciences and the humanities” (5).

<sup>64</sup> See J.B. Shank, “Neither Natural Philosophy, Nor Science, Nor Literature--Gender, Writing and the Pursuit of Nature in Fontenelle’s *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes inhabités*,” in *Men, Women, and the Birthing of Modern Science*, Judith P. Zinsser, ed. (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005) 86-110.

order to think about how science and literature can work together, we must attend to the gendered values attached to these disciplines, Fontenelle and his reception can be read in such a way as to shed light on critical debates taking place in twenty-first century ecocriticism.

I will discuss Fontenelle's use of the pastoral in three parts. I begin with Fontenelle's theory of the pastoral developed in the *Discours sur la Nature de l'Églogue*, which clearly delineates the relationship between pastoral and work. I consider next how these ideas are put into practice in Fontenelle's own collection of eclogues, *Les Poésies Pastorales*. Finally I examine Fontenelle's *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*, where pastoral provides the ideal textual environment in which to stage a dialogue between scientific and humanistic approaches to nature.

### **The Theoretical Nature of Pastoral: *Discours sur la Nature de l'Églogue***

In his *Discours sur la Nature de l'Églogue*, Fontenelle bases his criticism of both ancient and modern pastoral on their adherence to seventeenth-century aesthetic and generic rules governing art and literature. In *La Formation de la Doctrine Classique en France*, Bray describes the main formal criteria for classical pastoral that prohibited subject matter that was either too affected or complex to be appropriate, or too explicitly rustic to meet the essential standard of *bienséance*. He notes that these formal rules leave little room for the realities of country life: "Les deux règles essentielles du poème bucolique sont d'un côté la distinction des genres, qui lui interdit de sortir de sa simplicité constitutive [...] de l'autre les bienséances, qui le préservent de toute bassesse ou



grossièreté [...] En fait on écarte par là tout ce qui est essentiel à la campagne” (351). The way to balance the demands of *bienséance* and those of *vraisemblance* is a principal point of disagreement between the Ancients and the Moderns in the debate over the pastoral that is part of the *querelle*.

Fontenelle begins the *Discours* by tracing the history of pastoral representations of nature, placing it alongside the history of life in rural settings. In most respects, Fontenelle’s narrative of the history of pastoral matches that of his Ancient counterparts René Rapin and Hilaire Bernard de Longepierre. In this narrative, pastoral is located at the very origins of poetry itself. It represents the earliest kind of cultural production that sprung organically from the idyllic state of nature in which ancient shepherds tended their flocks. The lack of labor involved in this occupation made it conducive to the creation of poetry. Leisure enabled the first poet-shepherds to put nature into words. As Longepierre writes in the preface to his *Idylles*, they were inspired “par la nature, l’amour et l’oisiveté, à l’imitation du chant des oiseaux et du bruit des arbres, ou du murmure des ruisseaux” (Preface, n. pag.). In his *Discours*, Fontenelle tells a similar story about the original unity between art and nature in the earliest pastoral poetry:

Il est assez vraisemblable que ces premiers Pasteurs n’avisèrent, dans la tranquillité et l’oisiveté dont ils jouissaient, de chanter leurs plaisirs et leurs amours; et il était naturel qu’ils fissent souvent entrer dans leurs chants leurs troupeaux, les bois, les fontaines, et tous les objets qui leur étaient les plus familiers. (384)

Where Fontenelle's take on the history of pastoral differs from that of Rapin and Longepierre, is in his desire to acknowledge the changes that have taken place in the lives of people and the nature of the places that pastoral poetry is meant to represent. If, at the time when the first pastoral eclogues were being composed, the lives of shepherds made a suitable subject for poetry, Fontenelle argues that this is no longer the case by the end of the seventeenth century. He describes the decline of the quality of rural life that occurs as a consequence of the "progress" of humankind:

La Société se perfectionna, ou peut-être se corrompit: mais enfin les hommes passèrent à des occupations qui leur parurent plus importantes; de plus grands intérêts les agitèrent; on bâtit des villes de tous côtés, et avec le temps ils se forma de grands Etats. Alors les Habitants de la campagne furent les esclaves de ceux des villes; et la vie pastorale étant devenue le partage des plus malheureux d'entre les hommes, n'inspira plus rien d'agréable. (385)

Fontenelle traces this disjunction between life in nature and its representation in literature as far back as Theocritus, the author the Ancients hold to be one of the primary models that contemporary pastoral writers should strive to imitate. The evidence of the disjunction in Theocritus is the eloquent language of his shepherds. Far from criticizing Theocritus for failing to represent shepherds as they truly are, Fontenelle wants to embrace this move away from rusticity. In fact his main criticism of Theocritus is that his poems still reflect rural life too accurately. Theocritus's shepherds, while more refined in speech and manners than their real-life counterparts, still speak too coarsely: "Je ne sais comment il n'a pas senti qu'il fallait leur ôter une certaine grossiereté qui sied toujours

mal” (386). What is even worse in the eyes of Fontenelle is that they speak too frequently of their work.

Virgil’s eclogues, largely modelled after the *Idylls* of his predecessor Theocritus, are subject to the same criticisms. According to Bruno Snell, the kind of move that Fontenelle advocates in his theory--a move away from the demands of verisimilitude and towards representing an inner landscape-- already began to occur in Virgil’s pastoral poetry. Virgil transforms Theocritus’s “clippings from the panorama of life” into what Snell calls “a highly un-lifelike landscape of the mind [...] an absolute realm detached from all that is not art and literature” (291). However, while Virgil’s pastoral stays closer to the idyllic than the rustic, Fontenelle still finds fault with his occasional depiction of work with animals, or struggles with difficult environmental conditions such as floods or droughts.<sup>65</sup> More than the simple depiction of work and misery, it is the intermingling of the worlds of work and leisure that offends Fontenelle. The passages from Virgil’s eclogues that he cites in the *Discours* as examples of overly explicit descriptions of rural labor are all the more disconcerting in their original context because they follow passages about love, jolting readers out of the pleasant frame of mind that had been brought about by “quelques traits d’amour fort jolis et galants, qui ont fait perdre au lecteur le goût des choses purement rustiques” (388). For Annabel Patterson, Fontenelle’s approach to this literary mode can best be described as a “theory of erasure,” suppressing the details of the less picturesque aspects of life close to nature, creating a “protective covering over our

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<sup>65</sup> Some examples of offending passages that Fontenelle cites from Virgil include: “Mes brebis, n’avancez pas tant sur le bord de la rivière, le bélier qui y est tombé n’est pas encore bien séché”, or “Tityre, empêche les chèvres d’approcher e la rivière; je les laverai dans la fontaine quand il en sera temps” (388).

experience of the physical world, so that only those phenomena remain visible that are consistent with pleasure and decency” (238).<sup>66</sup>

The mark of modern pastoral should be a turning away from the physical nature and the physical labor of the countryside to embrace a more idealized literary representation of leisure and inner nature: “c’est que l’idée ne tombe plus précisément sur le ménage de la campagne, mais sur le peu de soins dont on y est chargé [...] et ce qui est le principal, sur le peu qu’il coûte pour y être heureux” (389). Because the pastoral is based on leisure and not labor, Fontenelle objects to Sanazzar’s inclusion of fishermen in his eclogues. While harvesters or wine growers could stand in for shepherds, fishing crosses the line into hard labor. In addition, the fruits of this labor are less appropriate gifts to present to a loved one: “il est plus agréable d’envoyer à sa Maîtresse des fleurs ou des fruits, que des huîtres à l’écaille” (393).

Although it is usually discussed in terms of adherence to ancient models versus celebrating contemporary innovation, the debate between Ancients and Moderns over the pastoral is also an attempt to define pastoral’s relationship to “real” life in nature. Both sides express a desire to find a *juste milieu* between the vulgar rusticity of Theocritus (and, to a lesser extent, Virgil) and the unbelievably polished language and lofty subject matter that plague many modern pastorals. In his *Réflexions sur la poétique de ce temps et sur les ouvrages des poètes anciens et modernes* (1674), which takes as its source the writings of Aristotle and Horace, Ancient René Rapin defines *bienséance* as the most fundamental rule for literature, the moral propriety and coherence of characters and their

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<sup>66</sup> See Annabel Patterson, *Pastoral and Ideology: Virgil to Valéry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

actions being necessary for establishing another essential quality, *vraisemblance*. To demonstrate the most common infractions of the rule of *bienséance*, he uses two pastoral examples; the shepherds of Guarini, who are unbelievably eloquent, and those of Ronsard, who are disconcertingly vulgar. Fontenelle describes the same two extremes that pastoral should avoid: “entre la grossiereté des bergers de Théocrite, et le trop d’esprit de la plupart des bergers modernes, il y a un milieu a tenir” (402). Boileau as well identifies these “deux excès” in his *Art Poétique* (1674):

Mais souvent dans ce style un rimeur aux avois  
 Jette là, de dépit, la flûte et le hautbois;  
 Et, follement pompeux, dans sa verve indiscrete,  
 Au milieu d’une églogue entonne la trompette.  
 De peur de l’écouter Pan fuit dans les roseaux;  
 et les Nymphes, d’effroi, se cachent sous les eaux.  
 Au contraire cet autre, abject en son langage,  
 Fait parler ses bergers comme on parle au village. (*Chant II*)

Among the modern examples of an author who errs by incorporating complex subject matter into his pastoral poetry Fontenelle cites Jean Regnault de Segrais, the man who served as Montpensier’s secretary and influenced her pastoral writing. In the preface to his collection of eclogues, Segrais expresses his own discomfort with the material treated in selected poems. He explains that if he exceeded the humble bounds of the eclogue, it was against his will; he was forced to break this rule in order to cater more successfully

to the literary tastes of women and of members of the court.<sup>67</sup> Segrain's views on the pastoral are representative of the Ancients, who, unlike Fontenelle, express regret at what they perceive to be the increasingly wider gap between the realities of the countryside and the literary representation of the rural in the pastoral. Echoing the sentiments of many of his fellow Ancients, Longepierre writes in the preface to his *Idylles* that although concessions must be made to contemporary tastes, he questions the validity of a taste that looks upon nature as distasteful:

En effet, nous aimons à présent les Bergers galants [...] et ceux qui auraient du rapport à leur véritable condition, et qui seraient, si je l'ose dire, semblables à eux-mêmes, passeraient dans notre esprit pour de francs paysans. J'avoue que notre goût en cela est peut-être mauvais, puis qu'il s'éloigne de la nature et par conséquent de la vérité. (18)

For the Ancients, fidelity to classical pastoral models leads to a faithful representation of the countryside. Fontenelle, however, reimagines the purpose of the pastoral, turning towards nature by a different route than the one offered by "realistic" representation. As we shall see, his pastoral offers not a fantasy but a model for living, which can shape the behavior of readers.

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<sup>67</sup> Segrain writes: "Je supplie seulement les Sçavans de considérer que s'il y a quelques traits dans la cinquième Églogue, où je me suis un peu élevé au-dessus du style propre à ce genre d'écrire [...] je ne l'ai fait qu'après avoir remarqué que le goût de mon siècle s'y portait, et qu'elles plaisaient davantage de cette sorte aux Dames et aux gens de la Cour; en cela je leur ai fait un sacrifice volontaire de mes propres sentiments" (ii). *Eglogues de Monsieur de Segrain, de l'Académie Française; avec les Passages imités des Poètes Latins. L'Athis, Poème Pastoral. Le Portrait de Mademoiselle du mesme Auteur* (Paris: 1733).

As Alain Niderst has pointed out, the Ancients' insistence on representing 'real' peasants in pastoral poetry was perhaps a less successful engagement with the difficult aspects of peasant life than Fontenelle demonstrated with his pastoral theory. In Fontenelle's rejection of realistic descriptions of rural hardship, he acknowledges a reality that the Ancients refused to see: "Devant les dures vérités qu'assénait Fontenelle-- la grossièreté de la vie rustique, et donc la foncière facticité de l'églogue-- il fallait réagir. Les classiques ne voulaient pas quitter le réel, mais quel réel, quand, au sortir de Paris et de Versailles, on voyait ces 'animaux farouches' que peignait La Bruyère?" (*La Pastorale* 99).<sup>68</sup> Fontenelle, along with other proponents of modern pastoral, brings to light the disparity between the difficult conditions of rural life and the idyllic conditions of pastoral poetry.<sup>69</sup> For Fontenelle, more than the imitation of nature, the goal of pastoral poetry is to transport the reader to an idyllic state of nature. Fontenelle is more ready to forgive the falsity of Honoré d'Urfé's shepherds in *L'Astrée*, "courtiers in disguise," than

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<sup>68</sup> Jean de La Bruyère's *Les Caractères* (1688) includes a portrait of rural peasants whose humanity and labor goes unrecognized by members of other social classes: "L'on voit certains animaux farouches, des mâles et des femelles, répandus par la campagne, noirs, livides, et tout brûlés du soleil, attachés à la terre qu'ils fouillent et qu'ils remuent avec une opiniâtré invincible [...] ils épargent aux autres hommes la peine de semer, de labourer et de recueillir pour vivre, et méritent ainsi de ne pas manquer de ce pain qu'ils ont semé" (242-3). See La Bruyère, *Les Caractères ou les moeurs de ce siècle* (Paris : Union générale d'éditions, 1963).

<sup>69</sup> The hardships of contemporary rural life, and in particular the rural life in France compared to other European countries, is central to the Abbé du Bos's discussion of pastoral poetry in his *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et la peinture*, Vol.1 (Paris: J. Mariette, 1719) 168-175. Unlike the rural peasants of Virgil's time whose leisure and comfort corresponded to the lifestyle depicted in pastoral poetry, eighteenth-century French peasants are "occupés uniquement à se procurer par les travaux pénibles d'une vie laborieuse, de quoi subvenir aux besoins les plus pressants d'une famille toujours indigente" (172). On these grounds Du Bos argues that authors such as Fontenelle are correct in excluding these people from pastoral literature.

the baseness of Theocritus. Detailed descriptions of rural life and labor must be excluded because they interfere with the reader's transport. While the evocation of the tranquillity of the countryside facilitates this movement, material details have the opposite effect:

Quand on me représente le repos qui règne à la campagne, la simplicité et la tendresse avec laquelle l'amour s'y traite, mon imagination touchée et émue me transporte dans la condition de Berger, je suis Berger; mais que l'on me représente, quoiqu'avec toute l'exactitude et toute la justesse possible, les viles occupations des Bergers, elles ne font point d'envie, et mon imagination demeure fort froide. (395)

For Fontenelle, as for Montpensier and Rousseau, the power of the pastoral lies in its capacity to transport readers to nature, and to invite the reader to imitate the lifestyle it depicts. The distinction between pastoral as fantasy and pastoral as a model for living emerges particularly clearly in his *Dialogues des Morts* (1683), in a fictional dialogue between Anne de Bretagne and Marie de France. The question of whether or not pastoral can pass from the pages of fiction to real life is raised as part of an argument about human nature. In support of her argument that human nature is too tempestuous to be satisfied with simple pleasures of pastoral life, Anne de Bretagne declares that pastoral can exist only in literature: "D'où vient que la vie pastorale, telles que les poètes la dépeignent, n'a jamais été que dans leurs ouvrages, et ne réussirait jamais dans la pratique? Elle est trop douce et trop unie" (187). Marie de France responds that there is something universal in the pastoral that makes it appeal to our inner nature: "Mais d'où vient que la vue d'une Cour la plus superbe et la plus pompeuse du monde les flate moins



que les idées qu'ils se proposent quelquefois de cette vie pastorale? C'est qu'ils étaient faits pour elle" (188). While Fontenelle's pastoral theory appears to reject the representation of rural labor as something that inhibits reader transport, his practice of the pastoral in his *Poésies* and his *Entretiens* tells a different story. For Fontenelle, as for Montpensier and Rousseau, descriptions of intellectual and physical work in nature facilitate reader transport by breaking down boundaries that separate the reader's cultural world from the pastoral world of the text.

### **Traveling between Culture and Nature: *Les Poésies Pastorales***

In his eclogues, Fontenelle is interested in exploring the space between the court and the countryside, as well as the social distance between the courtier and the shepherd. As shepherds travel to the city, and courtiers travel to the countryside, the distance between these two worlds, and between the world of the reader and the world of the pastoral eclogue, grows less significant. The blurring of spatial boundaries is mapped onto the boundaries between culture and nature, and between reason and emotion.

The *Poésies Pastorales* are devoid of any detailed descriptions of natural settings or rural labor, in accordance with the theory that Fontenelle sets forth in the *Discours*. Niderst compares the nature of Fontenelle's eclogues to the idealized natural settings represented in eighteenth-century painter François Boucher's pastoral works: "Elle n'est ni colorée, ni vivante, ni mystérieuse; elle ne sert qu'à suggérer des idées sereines et

paisibles” (*À la recherche* 263).<sup>70</sup> Shepherds and shepherdesses express themselves too eloquently to be mistaken for their real-life counterparts, and they are usually so distracted by thoughts of love that they neglect their flocks of sheep. However, as is the case in Montpensier’s pastoral, the countryside described in these poems is not outside of time and history. Nor does it serve as the mirror image of the culture of the city or the court. Instead, through its narratives of travel between the country and the city, Fontenelle’s pastoral breaks down the culture/nature duality and suggests that nature is political and historical. The urban and the rural, the royal and the humble, are constantly coming into contact, and the encounters usually reveal more similarities than differences. Noting this reimagining of the geo-political relationship between court and country, Pierre Brunel writes, “La campagne n’est donc pas un en-deça, mais un à côté, un domaine protégé par la grandeur royale” (138). If these eclogues fail the test of verisimilitude as the Ancients might understand it, nonetheless they ask readers to rethink their conceptions of the ‘real’ differences between the court and the country.

The first eclogue in the *Poésies Pastorales* tells the story of a noblewoman’s journey to the pastoral countryside, and a shepherd’s journey to court. The appearance of a beautiful stranger in the hamlet sparks a debate between two shepherdesses as to whether she is a goddess or a mortal. While her striking beauty leads one shepherdess to

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<sup>70</sup> For a discussion of Boucher’s (1703-1770) influence on conventions of pastoral painting see Melissa Lee Hyde, *Making up the Rococo: François Boucher and his critics* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2006), and “Confounding Conventions: Gender Ambiguity and François Boucher’s Painted Pastorals,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 30.1 (Fall 1996): 25-57. Hyde discusses the frequent association of Boucher’s style with Fontenelle, quoting Grimm for example, who states that Boucher has Fontenelle’s “luxury, his refinement, his preciousness, his factitious graces” (qtd. in *Making up the Rococo* 158).

believe she is immortal, her kind treatment of those far beneath her station, “sa bonté descendant sans peine jusqu’à nous,” convinces the other shepherdess of her humanity (322). Thus the residents of the hamlet are linked to the royal visitor by a similar inner nature. A passing shepherd is able to settle their dispute by identifying the mystery woman as the Dauphine. He can attest to her identity because he has already encountered her at court, where she displayed the same gracious ability to relate to members of different social classes. She even enjoys the rustic songs that he plays for her, preferring it to the “airs plus polis” to which she is more accustomed. Although the luxury and spectacle of urban culture leaves the shepherd speechless, his experiences confirm the interconnectedness of his world and the world of court. Just as the music of the hamlet enriches court culture, Louis XIV’s bounty improves the lives of those living in the countryside: “Cette cour, d’où LOUIS prend plaisir à répandre/ Les biens dont est comblé ce rustique séjour” (322). As this verse demonstrates, the hierarchy between the court and the countryside does not disappear. The eclogue ends with the shepherd wondering if his humble oboe is fit to sing the praises of the Dauphine; this question is a common feature of a literary mode concerned with taking on subject matter that exceeds its limits. If the hierarchical relationship between the shepherd and the courtier seems to remain in place, in fact it is broken down by the eclogue’s foregrounding of what these two groups have in common, namely, their humanity, or their inner nature. It is this commonality and interconnectedness that emerges from the Dauphine’s journey to the country and the shepherd’s visit to court.

Movement between urban and rural spaces is also the subject of the sixth eclogue in Fontenelle's *Poésies*. As in the first eclogue, this movement reveals that the relationship between country and city is far more complex than the nature/culture dualism would imply. The eclogue begins with the shepherd Ligdamis preparing his love Climène for her upcoming voyage to the city. His warnings to her contain traditional oppositions between the rural and the urban. In contrast to the humble but sincere language with which Ligdamis expresses his love for Climène, he prepares her to hear the elegant but false flattery of the men she will encounter in the city. He worries that after her journey she will no longer be content with their simple life. In the second half of the eclogue however, as Ligdamis anticipates the return of his love, he begins to speak of the new clarity this voyage will bring; in the time that Climène has spent in the city, she has gained appreciation for the virtues of her pastoral life: "Que ne l'avez-vous vue exprès, / Pour savoir de quel prix est cet amour sans feinte [...] De quel prix sont nos bois pour s'y parler sans crainte" (359). Her journey is recast in such a way that the city is no longer the dangerous place that threatens the innocence of shepherds and their way of life. Knowledge of the similarities and differences between these two spaces and their inhabitants informs the pastoral identity rather than destroying it. Ligdamis reports that Climène will return to the hamlet "plus bergère encore / Que vous n'étiez en nous quittant" (359).

In my discussion of Fontenelle's *Discours sur la nature de l'églogue*, I argued that breaking down differences between nature and culture, between the pastoral world and the world of the reader, is designed to facilitate the reader's transport to the pastoral.

As in Montpensier and Rousseau, the pastoral world elaborated in Fontenelle's texts is designed to be imitated, to inform the everyday lives of readers. Instead of using the pastoral to escape to a place outside of history, readers are moved to incorporate elements of the text into their lives. The second eclogue contrasts Honoré d'Urfé's *L'Astrée*, and *Amadis*, a romance that tells of the chivalrous feats of an errant knight. In Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1605-1615), *Amadis* comes to represent the distance between literature and reality. In his attempts to imitate the fictional knight Amadis, Don Quixote fails to recognize this distance.<sup>71</sup> In Fontenelle's comparison between the romance novel represented by *Amadis* and the pastoral novel *L'Astrée*, the pastoral emerges as a model of living that could feasibly be imitated without any of the ridiculous results caused by the kind of imitation of fiction represented in *Don Quixote*<sup>72</sup>: "Quand je lis d'Amadis les faits inimitables, / Je n'ai point le regret que ce soient-là des Fables. / [...] Mais quand je lis *L'Astrée*, où dans un doux repos l'Amour seul occupe de plus charmans Héros, / [...] Dieux! que je suis fâché que ce soit un Roman!" (325). Thus the notion of imitability distinguishes the pastoral from other forms of literature. While the reader of *Amadis* cannot imitate the way of life portrayed in the book, and would not want to, the model provided by *L'Astrée* is so compelling that the reader wishes it were real. It is of course

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<sup>71</sup> The author of *Amadis* is unknown, but it is thought that the original version was written in Spanish in the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The book was extremely popular throughout Europe, and was translated into seven languages. The most popular French adaptation of *Amadis* appeared in 1559, entitled *Trésor des livres d'Amadis* by Nicolas d'Herberay. For a discussion of *Amadis*' influence and publication history see Edwin Bray Place, Preface, *Amadis of Gaul* (Lexington : University Press of Kentucky, 2003) 9-15.

<sup>72</sup> In the second preface to *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*, Rousseau invokes a comparison between *L'Astrée* and *Don Quixote* to make a similar point about pastoral. For my discussion of these two works in the context of *Julie*, see Chapter 3, 25.

not Fontenelle's suggestion that upon reading pastoral eclogues one is moved to become a shepherd, but rather to follow the pastoral ideal, "l'idée de la tranquillité." Fontenelle makes a similar point when, later on in the same eclogue, he compares two literary parodies of life imitating fiction, *Don Quixote* and Charles Sorel's *Le Berger extravagant* (1627). He finds that Sorel's tale of a wealthy Parisian who decides to take up shepherding is a more compelling confusion of reality and fiction than Don Quixote's delusions of knighthood. The reader is drawn to the pastoral lifestyle of Sorel's extravagant shepherd Lysis, even when they encounter it in a text that satirizes pastoral literature:

Nous n'imiterons pas du Héros de Cervantes  
 [...] Sans doute nos esprits ne seront point blessés  
 Du fol entêtement de la Chevalerie,  
 [...] Mais pour cette puissante et douce rêverie,  
 Qui fit errer Lysis dans les Plaines de la Brie,  
 [...] Rétablissant la Bergerie  
 Dans l'éclat des siècles passés,  
 Cher ami, sans plaisanterie,  
 N'en sommes-nous point menacés? (326)

Again, through its imitability, the life proposed through the pastoral literary imaginary has a greater capacity to inform ways of being in contemporary society.

The fifth eclogue takes up the issue of imitation and ties it to Fontenelle's conception of the role of the modern eclogue. In the opening verses, he locates himself

within the pastoral tradition founded by Theocritus and Virgil. To articulate where his eclogue departs from these ancient examples, he invokes Virgil's famous fourth eclogue, which speaks of the birth of a boy that heralds the coming of a new golden age. Virgil acknowledges that by addressing this lofty subject in an eclogue he is pushing the limits of humble pastoral poetry. However, Virgil concludes that the pastoral is not an unfit setting in which to speak of this powerful child, or indeed any person of significance: "Sicilian Muses, let us sing a somewhat loftier strain. Not everyone do orchards and the lowly tamarisks delight. If our song is of the woodland, let the woods be worthy of a consul" (49). Following Virgil's conception of the eclogue as a place where the hierarchy between noble and humble, the political and the natural, can be broken down, Fontenelle expresses his desire to break down the separation between the natural and the rational intellect:

Le Berger [Virgil] qui jadis hérita le hautbois  
 Du grand Pasteur de Syracuse [Theocritus],  
 [...] Voulait que des forêts la demeure sauvage,  
 D'un Consul quelquefois fût d'un digne séjour.  
 J'entreprends un plus grand ouvrage,  
 Moi qui voudrais rendre dignes d'un Sage,  
 Des forêts où règne l'Amour." (351)

Responding to critics who object to the uncharacteristically eloquent shepherds that populate modern pastoral, Fontenelle justifies pushing conventional boundaries by citing the precedent set by Virgil. By breaking down the distinction between the rational "sage"

and the lovesick shepherd, Fontenelle hopes to facilitate the reader's identification with the pastoral world depicted in his poetry. He invites the reader to move beyond their ideas of conventional pastoral form, and conventional distinctions between intellect and emotion, in order to consider the similarities between themselves and the shepherds of his eclogues: "Vous donc que la sagesse admet dans ses mystères; / Qui, simple spectateur des passions vulgaires, / De leurs ressorts en nous considérez le jeu, / Prenez des yeux qui ne soient point austères / Pour un berger qui vous ressemble un peu" (352).

We have seen how Fontenelle's pastoral poetry confronts conventional limits placed upon this literary mode. In order to create a pastoral that engages with the contemporary political world, as well as pastoral characters to which his contemporaries can relate, he breaks down the boundary between nature and culture -- between shepherds and courtiers, the country and the city, the emotional and the intellectual. As shepherds and courtiers move between the country and the city, they discover more similarities than differences. The pastoral emerges as a place to open up communication between different social classes, and between different kinds of knowledge. In the *Discours* and the *Poésies Pastorales*, Fontenelle puts pastoral in communication with the modern political world, and this theory is put into practice the *Entretiens sur la Pluralité des Mondes*. In this text, pastoral is mobilized to demonstrate the non-dualistic relationship of elements conventionally associated with nature and culture: feminine and masculine, leisure and labor, literary (particularly the pastoral) and scientific. These relationships offer an important model to contemporary ecocriticism in its attempt to create an interdisciplinary dialogue between the sciences and the humanities. As we will see, the *Entretiens* offers



significant insight into how to revalue the contributions that literature can make to the ecocritical conversation.

**Traveling between worlds: *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes habités***

The *Entretiens* brings pastoral literature into dialogue with Cartesian science, a combination that proved highly successful judging by the work's enormous popularity. In Fontenelle's lifetime alone, thirty-three editions of the *Entretiens* appeared. While the Cartesian theories advanced in the text became obsolete when Newton published his theory of universal gravitation in 1687, it continued to captivate readers. Upon its first publication, it received a glowing review from the *Mercure Galant*, the gazette in which Fontenelle had published his first literary works.<sup>73</sup> The language of this review reveals the extent to which science in late seventeenth-century France needed literature. As Christophe Martin and others have pointed out, more than making science accessible to the general public, Fontenelle's project was to gain acceptance for science amongst polite society: "en leur préciosité, les comparaisons et les métaphores fontenelliennes sont moins les instruments d'une 'vulgarisation' que le moyen opportun de soustraire le langage à toute vulgarité" (24). The same anxiety around the idea of labor that leads Fontenelle to exclude representations of rural work from his pastoral poetry manifests itself in the *Entretiens* as a reaction to the technical, specialized knowledge of science.

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<sup>73</sup> Steven Rendall discusses the *Mercure Galant*'s function as one of the few publications that sought to connect the provinces and Paris. For Rendall, the publication of Fontenelle's work in the *Mercure* represents Fontenelle's effort to include the provinces in the cultural productions of the capital, and to transcend the divisions that defined the reading public of the late seventeenth century. See Rendall, "Fontenelle and his Public," *Modern Language Notes* 86.4 (May 1971): 496-508.

Just as Fontenelle's eclogues avoid realistic representations of shepherds and detailed descriptions of their rural labor that "sentent trop la campagne," in the *Entretiens* he avoids technical expressions that conjure up images of intellectual work. The *Mercur* *Galant* reassures its readers that they will find nothing offensive in the *Entretiens*, because scientific discourse is reinforced and dignified by literary discourse. As opposed to the feminine pursuit of science as it is portrayed in works like Molière's *Les Femmes Savantes* (1672)—as a practice that leads to the ridiculous reversal of gender roles in domestic and social settings, thwarting relationships between men and women—the *Entretiens* presents astronomy as common ground between the sexes, a completely natural subject for mixed-gender conversations:

Un nouveau livre, qui, quoi qu'il soit de Philosophie, est tourné si galamment que la matière n'a rien de sauvage [...] La physique y est amené à la portée de toutes dames [...] Elle y est soutenue de toutes les reflexions morales que le sujet peut produire; elle y est ornée de traits d'histoire et egayée par tous les agréments, même de galanterie, qui peuvent naître dans la conversation d'un homme et d'une femme d'esprit. Enfin, c'est de la philosophie déguisée, qui avec la vérité qu'elle doit toujours avoir a les graces qu'elle n'a pas ordinairement. (quoted in Calame 8)

The attempt to bring together *vérité* and *grace* necessitates cooperation between literary imagination and the often ungraceful realities of the physical world. In the *Discours sur la nature de l'églogue*, Fontenelle identifies an ideal "juste milieu" for pastoral literature somewhere in between the baseness of the ancient pastoral of Theocritus and Virgil, and

the artificial, unbelievably refined nature of modern pastorals such as d'Urfé's *L'Astrée*. Similarly, Fontenelle frames the *Entretiens* as a means to reach an ideal middle ground, a text that will speak both to *savants* interested in hard truths and to *gens du monde* interested in pleasure and entertainment. As he does in the *Discours*, in the preface to the *Entretiens* he grapples with the difficulty of finding this middle ground: "Il se peut bien qu'en cherchant un milieu où la philosophie convînt à tout le monde, j'en aie trouvé un où elle ne convient à personne; les milieux sont trop difficiles à tenir" (50).

To create a textual environment that showcases the common ground between science and literature, the academic and the mondain, the *Entretiens* turns to the pastoral. The text brings together two distinct traditions of the representation of nature in literature whose most well-known representatives are the *Eclogues* and the *Georgics* of Virgil. The *Eclogues*, which inspire Fontenelle's own pastoral poetry, feature leisurely shepherds singing of love in an idyllic countryside, while the *Georgics* are a guide to living off the land, filled with detailed descriptions of farming techniques and the labors of cultivation. The bucolic setting and the flirtatious conversations between the philosopher and the Marquise during their garden strolls have led many to critics to comment on the influence of Virgil's eclogues in the *Entretiens*. In his *Réflexions critique sur la poésie et sur la peinture* (1719), the Abbé du Bos praises the *Entretiens* as "la meilleure églogue qu'on nous ait donné depuis 50 ans [...] les descriptions et les images que font les interlocuteurs sont très convenables au caractère de la poésie pastorale, et il y a plusieurs de ces images que Virgile aurait employées volontiers" (I, section 22, 170). As in the *Mercure Galant's* review, in Du Bos's words we can read how the scientific way of knowing nature gains

credit through its connection to pastoral's way of imagining nature in literature. In the preface to the *Entretiens*, Fontenelle emphasizes the natural affinity between these two ways of knowing by casting science as a pleasurable, casual pursuit. He describes the kind of intellectual effort required for understanding in clear terms in order to disarm reader anxiety about what they will encounter. While he does admit that comprehending scientific theories demands a small amount of work on the part of the Marquise, this effort is authorized because it is no different than the kind of effort required to understand the novel *La Princesse de Clèves* (1678). As Juliette Cherbuliez has noted, this passage valorizes the feminine-coded activity of novel reading ("Ways of Knowing" 115). The invocation of the *Princesse de Clèves* is not meant to imply that reading about science is accessible *even* to women, but that women who can understand a complex work like Lafayette's novel can also understand Cartesian cosmology:

À la vérité, elle s'applique un peu, mais qu'est-ce ici que s'appliquer? Ce n'est pas pénétrer à force de méditation une chose obscure d'elle-même, ou expliquée obscurément, c'est seulement ne point lire sans se représenter nettement ce qu'on lit. Je ne demande aux dames pour tout ce système de philosophie que la même application qu'il faut donner à *La Princesse de Clèves*. (51-52)

In Francesco Algarotti's preface to his *Newtonianisme pour les Dames* (1737), a text that is modeled after the *Entretiens*, a similar acknowledgement of scientific discourse's dependence on feminine social practices emerges. Algarotti lauds the *Entretiens* for putting science into circulation, moving it out of the dark recesses of male-only spaces into the light of feminine society: "vous sâtes rappeler la philosophie du fond des

cabinets et des bibliothèques, pour l'introduire dans les cercles et à la toilette des dames” (xlii).

Because the subject of astronomy is naturally entertaining, Fontenelle does not need to go to great lengths to raise it a level worthy of literature or the *ruelle*. The *utile* and the *agréable*, the scientific exploration of nature and the literary imagining of nature, are almost indistinguishable: “il se trouve heureusement dans ce sujet que les idées de physique y sont riantes d'elle-mêmes, et que dans le même temps qu'elles contentent la raison, elle donnent à l'imagination un spectacle qui lui plaît autant que s'il était fait exprès pour elle” (*Entretiens* 52). When dealing with certain unpleasantly difficult aspects of his subject matter, Fontenelle turns to Virgil's *Georgics* as a model. Virgil renders his discussion of agricultural practice more palatable by weaving philosophical digressions throughout the text, whereby “il sauve le fond de sa matière, qui est tout à fait sèche” (52).<sup>74</sup> Like Virgil, Fontenelle weaves together two different ways of knowing about nature. Throughout the text his discussion of astronomy leads into digressions about literature and history. These digressions are not superficial feminine ornaments designed to sweeten the bitter medicine of masculine scientific knowledge. The gendered dualism of masculine and feminine ways of knowing is broken down in the text. Science needs literature to tell its story, to convince readers that there is not an incommensurable distance between their world and the world as it is imagined by new scientific theories.

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<sup>74</sup> In his *Réflexions sur la poétique* (Paris: Librairie Droz 1970), Rapin also cites the *Georgics* as an example of Virgil's ability to make even the most base elements of rural existence a subject fit for poetry: “Virgile plaist jusques dans le fumier et dans les chardons de ses *Géorgiques*” (21).

It is the pastoral mode that allows Fontenelle to bridge these distances between ways of knowing the world. The story of astronomy, as Fontenelle tells it, begins with the pastoral. As the philosopher explains to the Marquise, the earliest astronomers were the Chaldéen shepherds, “dont le grand loisir produisit les premières observations” (66). The practice of astronomy is casual and benign, “fille de l’oisiveté,” in contrast to the less polite science of geometry, “fille de l’intérêt,” born out of farmers’ desire to measure their fields and establish official boundaries of their private property. What recommends the pursuit of astronomy to the Marquise is its genealogy that can be traced back to leisure, and its direct opposition to any notion of work for material gain. Her curiosity is all the more natural because she inhabits a landscape very similar to the one that allowed the first astronomical observations: “Heureusement encore que nous sommes à la campagne, et nous y menons quasi une vie pastorale; tout cela convient à l’astronomie” (66). The study of nature is also framed as a suitable activity for the Marquise because the natural world resembles a cultural site with which she is familiar. The philosopher informs the Marquise that discovering the workings of nature is like pulling back the curtains at the opera to reveal all that goes on backstage:

Je me figure toujours que la nature est un grand spectacle qui ressemble à celui de l’Opéra. Du lieu où vous êtes à l’Opéra, vous ne voyez pas le théâtre tout à fait comme il est; on a disposé les décorations et les machines, pour faire de loin un effet agréable, et on cache à votre vue ces roues et ces contrepoids qui font tous les mouvements. (62)

In this passage, the difference between the gender-coded activities of opera-going and scientific observation, between leisure and labor, is broken down, and the study of nature emerges as both a pleasurable and rational pursuit. Isabelle Mullet has discussed the significance of Fontenelle's choice of the opera as the cultural metaphor through which to explain the natural world.<sup>75</sup> The opera, as a distinctly modern art form with no ancient models, is an apt vehicle for advancing the Moderns' political program, including the acceptability of new scientific ideas. As he lists the ways in which ancient philosophers would have explained the flight that takes place in Lully's opera *Phaéton*, the philosopher opposes himself and the Marquise, with their enlightened understanding of the machines behind the operatic spectacle, to ancient darkness. Thus scientific modernity is connected to a mixed gender group, and to a social milieu in which men and women are on equal footing.

At the center of different critical interpretations of the *Entretiens* is a debate about the reciprocity, or lack thereof, in the dialogue between the Marquise and the philosopher. This question of reciprocity has an important bearing on ecocritical discussions of how to bring together scientific and literary worldviews. The emphasis has been on making the literary imaginary more responsible to current developments in ecological and biological sciences, without much discussion of how science could benefit from engaging with literature. Erica Harth is representative of critics who point to the lack of reciprocity in the *Entretiens*. In her study of *Cartésiennes*, early modern women

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<sup>75</sup> See Isabelle Mullet, "Les *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* ou la politique perspectiviste," *Revue Fontenelle* 6/7 (2010): 349-362, and her book, *Fontenelle ou la Machine Perspectiviste* (Paris: Editions Honoré Champion, 2011).

who participated actively in scientific discourse, she sees Fontenelle's *Entretiens* as marking a moment of transition to a world in which possibilities for this kind of participation are shut down.<sup>76</sup> Harth sees a gendered culture/nature dualism functioning throughout the text as a way to deny women intellectual agency. Her reading is attentive to how the Marquise is connected to nature, with an "earthbound" subjectivity that is opposed to the philosopher's detached objective reasoning. In contrast to the mixed-gender debates held in salons, Harth finds the discussion between the Marquise and the philosopher to be one-sided, with the Marquise clearly on the side of the primitive and the unscientific: "In the context of the new science, the Marquise's subjectivity and consequent humanization of the world become categorized as mythical thought. [...] The mission taken on by her teacher is to draw her into the modern world, to convert her to the discourse of objectivity" (128). Harth's argument thus follows along similar lines as those of ecofeminists such as Carolyn Merchant, attributing the exclusion of women from science to their association with a devalued nature.<sup>77</sup> In this reading, the Marquise's gender stands for the accessibility of science. She becomes a kind of lowest common denominator of intelligence; if she can understand astronomy, than so can any layperson.

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<sup>76</sup> For an extensive discussion of the scientific contributions of early-modern women, and the eventual exclusion of women from scientific discourse, see Londa Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex? Women in the Origins of Modern Science* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).

<sup>77</sup> See Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980). Rebecca Wilkin complicates Merchant's reading of early modern science's objectification of feminized nature by exploring how new science, particularly Cartesianism, encouraged the participation of women. She also challenges the concept of the Cartesian rationalism through a discussion of the importance of imagination in Cartesian theory. See her *Women, Imagination, and the Search for Truth in Early-Modern France* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2008).



However, reading this text with an attention to how it demonstrates the ways in which natural philosophy needs literature, we arrive at a different interpretation of the role of the Marquise. Rather than figuring accessibility, the Marquise figures the acceptability of new scientific ideas. Through the imitability of the Marquise's character, women readers can identify their own intellectual capacity. In the *Entretiens*, the pastoral is used to induce reader transport; readers are invited to identify with the imaginary world of the text and to incorporate aspects of the literary into their lives. In the preface, Fontenelle describes how one of the Marquise's main functions in the text is to invite readers (particularly female readers) to imitation: "à encourager les dames par l'exemple d'une femme qui, ne sortant jamais des bornes d'une personne qui n'a nulle teinture de science, ne laisse pas d'entendre ce qu'on lui dit [...] Pourquoi des femmes céderaient-elles à cette marquise imaginaire, qui ne conçoit que ce qu'elle ne peut se dispenser de concevoir?" (51). Not only is the Marquise able to understand new scientific theories, but she plays an active role in directing the dialogue. The *Entretiens* presents an alternative to gendered nature/culture dualisms, rather than enforcing them. It offers a useful model for how to get past gendered ways of knowing attached to literary and scientific disciplines that prevent a genuinely interdisciplinary relationship.

The *Entretiens* is divided into six "evenings" of conversation (the first edition was made up of five evenings, but Fontenelle added a sixth to subsequent versions). These conversations are framed by a letter from the philosopher to "Monsieur L...", who has asked the philosopher to recount the details of his visit to the country estate of "Madame La Marquise de G..." The philosopher alerts his correspondent, along with the reader of

the *Entretiens*, that although the romantic bucolic setting might set up expectations of a conventional pastoral eclogue, the text will represent a post-pastoral departure from this tradition. In addition to the kind of story often told about nature in pastoral literature, one of leisurely pursuits enjoyed in idyllic settings, the conversations between the Marquise and the philosopher will tell the story of nature from the perspective of natural science: “Vous vous attendez à des fêtes, à des parties de jeu ou de chasse, et vous aurez des planètes, des mondes, des tourbillons” (57). During the first evening of conversation, the text signals its sidelining of the typically romantic mode of interaction between men and women in pastoral literature. Here, and throughout the text, the philosopher attempts to keep their conversation in ‘eclogue’ mode, but the Marquise repeatedly draws him back to the subject of natural philosophy. When the Marquise implores him to elaborate on his ideas about the planets of the universe, and the potential existence of life on these planets, he refuses, in the name of maintaining the atmosphere of pastoral romance: “Non, répliquai-je, il ne me sera point reproché que dans un bois, à dix heures du soir, j’aie parlé de philosophie à la plus aimable personne que je connaisse” (61). Later on, when the Marquise comments that the pastoral lifestyle of her country home is perfectly suited for astronomy, the philosopher again tries to steer the conversation back to pastoral romance by invoking the example of d’Urfé’s *L’Astrée*: “Ne vous y trompez pas, Madame, repris-je. Ce n’est pas la vraie vie pastorale, que de parler des planètes, et des étoiles fixes. Voyez si c’est à cela que les gens de *L’Astrée* passent leur temps” (66). The Marquise declares her preference for the working pastoral of the first astronomers, the Chaldéen shepherds who passed their leisure time not in flirtation but observation of the

stars. Through this hybrid form of pastoral that combines the georgic notions of working with nature and the eclogue's leisurely enjoyment of nature, the Marquise sets the terms of her relationship with the philosopher. The pleasure that they take in each other's company cannot be reduced to romance, for instead it involves their mutual enjoyment in learning about their environment. In a letter to Fontenelle, Voltaire jokingly describes the disruption in traditional gender roles provoked by the *Entretiens*. He expresses his desire for women to return to the more conventionally feminine literary form of the eclogue and to cease the intellectual pursuits that are creating more work for their suitors: "Les Dames qui sont ici se sont gâtées par la lecture de vos *Mondes*. Il vaudrait mieux que ce fût par vos églogues, nous les verrions plus volontiers bergères que philosophes, elles mettent à observer les astres un temps qu'elles pourraient mieux employer, et nous nous sommes tous faits physiciens pour l'amour d'elles" (quoted in Martin, 212).

At only one moment in the text is it the Marquise who steers the conversation from the scientific/georgic back into the realm of the pastoral eclogue, and this moment reveals how this dialogue skirts the border of two gender-coded ways of knowing nature. When the philosopher proposes to clarify his explanation of the zodiac by tracing it in the sand of the Marquise's garden, she objects on the grounds that these marks of intellectual labor would give her garden an undesirable "air savant" (73). To explain further what these marks in her garden would symbolize, she recounts the anecdote of a philosopher who believes himself to be stranded alone on an abandoned island but is reassured when he sees men's footsteps, signs of the presence of others like him. Allowing the drawing of a scholarly diagram in her garden seems to cross the line between leisure and work,

between a casual interest in knowledge and an applied effort to master it. The Marquise cannot follow the same path to knowledge as the philosopher, as such an effort would be inappropriate for a woman, and for someone of her social class. In addition, these marks of labor are inappropriate for the setting of a pastoral eclogue: “Vous jugez bien qu’il ne m’appartient point de faire ces pas-là, et qu’il ne faut pas qu’on en voie ici” (73).

However, when the philosopher suggests another kind of drawing that would be more fitting for the Marquise’s garden-- the initials of lovers carved into the trees--she again shuts down his attempt to cast their conversation as a pastoral romance: “Laissons-là, je vous prie, les adoreurs, reprit-elle, et parlons du Soleil” (73).

Throughout the text, the Marquise humanizes the philosopher’s scientific discourse and brings ideas from Cartesian cosmology down to earth. Upon hearing the philosopher describe a heliocentric universe, she finds that this system treats the earth and humankind badly. Copernican theory is “bien mal intentionné pour la Terre [...] c’est là une calomnie que vous avez inventée contre le genre humain. On n’aurait donc jamais dû recevoir le système de Copernic, puisqu’il est si humiliant” (71-72). As opposed to an earth that rests peacefully in its place of privilege at the center of the universe, the philosopher describes a planet in constant motion, one planet in a system of planets moving around the sun. The Marquise initially resists this idea, expressing her displeasure both with the idea of a hard-working earth and with an earth that has lost its prestige in the hierarchy of the solar system. She complains that in Copernican theory “la Terre prend tout sur soi, le Soleil ne fait rien” (74). When the philosopher compares the earth and its atmosphere to a silk worm and its cocoon, the Marquise attempts to

reestablish the dignity of the planet lost in this natural metaphor by invoking culture:

“Vous me présentez la Terre sous des idées bien méprisables. C’est pourtant sur cette coque de ver à soie qu’il se fait de si grands travaux, de si grandes guerres” (78-79). The

idea of an earth that turns, and a nature that is constantly changing, shakes the

foundations of everything the Marquise believes, but eventually she is ready to change

herself: “je me sens assez de courage pour oser tourner” (76). While Harth reads the

Marquise’s association with the earthly and the humanistic as a mark of her inability to

access modern scientific ideas, I argue that this is a positive association.<sup>78</sup> To disrupt the

Marquise’s connection with nature many scholars have pointed to the significant cultural

capital that she possesses by virtue of her gender and social class.<sup>79</sup> To gain access to the

influential audiences of the salons, Fontenelle needed powerful women like the

Marquise.<sup>80</sup> However, in order to see how the *Entretiens* bypasses the culture/nature

dualism, it is important to highlight how the literary imaginary and the humanistic are not

opposed to scientific reason, rather the two discourses work together in the text. The

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<sup>78</sup> For another reading of the Marquise as a stereotypical feminine figure ultimately more interested in romance than in science, see Noémi Hepp, “Imagines féminines dans l’oeuvre du jeune Fontenelle,” in *Fontenelle: Actes du Colloque tenu à Rouen du 6 au 10 Octobre 1987* (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 1989) 619-627. Comparing the Marquise the “foule de plaisantes marionnettes féminines” in Fontenelle’s *Dialogues des morts* and his *Lettres diverses*, Hepp describes her as “la première figure féminine douée de vie intellectuelle” (624). However, as the *Entretiens* progresses, Hepp sees Fontenelle undermine the Marquise’s intellectual ability through her constant humanizing of scientific discourse.

<sup>79</sup> Aileen Douglas reads the *Entretiens*, along with other early-modern texts generally classified as popularizations of science, as a way to disconnect women from nature by uncovering their cultural contributions. See “Popular Science and the Representation of Women: Fontenelle and After,” *Eighteenth-Century Life* 18 (1994): 1-14.

<sup>80</sup> Fontenelle frequented the salons of Mme Lambert, and the duchesse du Maine, among others.

earthly immobile feminine does not succumb to active masculine reason; rather the text sets in motion dialogue that breaks down these distinctions. The literary imaginary offers knowledge just as substantial as that obtained through the scientific process.

More than scientific knowledge gained through experiments, it is their imagination that allows the Marquise and the philosopher to travel through the solar system. One traditional function of pastoral literature has been to provide critical distance from which the political world can be seen more clearly. In the *Entretiens*, imagination provides this distance, allowing the Marquise and the philosopher to get a better perspective on earth's nature. In their imaginary travels, they discover similarities between the earth and other celestial bodies, and at the same time they discover the similarities between human beings, between men and women, people of different cultures and social classes. Without the critical distance made possible by their imaginations, these discoveries would not be possible. Telescopes have allowed earthly observers to gain some idea of the geography of the moon, but when the Marquise inquires about what life might really be like there, the philosopher admits that this knowledge is beyond the capabilities of science, and only literature can help them pursue that question. Science cannot tell the whole story of life on the moon, so the philosopher supplements it with the character Astolfo's experience of the moon in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*: "Il n'est pas possible, répliquai-je, que messieurs de l'Observatoire vous en instruisent, il faut le demander à Astolfe, qui fut conduit dans la Lune par saint Jean" (90). Upon learning that the earth, like the moon, is luminous, the Marquise ventures that there are no fundamental differences between members of upper classes who appear spectacular to those looking at

them from below, and members of lower classes. The philosopher agrees with this comparison between social knowledge and scientific knowledge. He suggests that somewhere between scientific and humanistic discourse, between outerspace and the earth, would be the ideal site for knowledge production: “Nous voulons juger de nous, nous en sommes trop près; nous voulons juger des autres, nous en sommes trop loin. Qui serait entre la Lune et la Terre, ce serait la vraie place pour les bien voir (83).

As they discuss the mechanics of the solar system and the possibility of life on other planets, the Marquise and the philosopher continue to base their speculations on both scientific observation and the literary imaginary. Because Venus is relatively close to the sun, its climate is hospitable to romance, and its population resembles characters from a pastoral romance: “Céladons et Silvandres, et leurs conversations valent les plus belles de *Clélie*” (122). However, there are moments when science must help the imagination move past its limits. Because the natural world often exceeds the limits of anything we could imagine, we need knowledge based on scientific observation of nature. The Marquise’s attempts to imagine inhabitants of other planets always result in something that too closely resembles human beings: “J’eus lieu de reprocher à la Marquise ce que nous reprochent, à la vue de nos tableaux, de certains peuples qui ne font jamais que des peintures bizarres et grotesques. *Bon, nous disent-ils, cela est tout fait comme des hommes, il n’y a pas là d’imagination*” (121). One of the principal limits of the imagination, and of the literary imagination in particular, is figured in the *Entretiens* by *vraisemblance*. In the debate over seventeenth-century pastoral aesthetic, Fontenelle argues that pastoral poetry should not be constrained to resemble seventeenth-century

rural life. Pastoral literature that favors a more realistic version of nature over a literary imagining of nature cannot transport readers in the same way. The demand for verisimilitude in scientific theories of the universe similarly restricts their potential to inform our understanding of the natural world. The philosopher notes that human beings themselves are quite unbelievable, and behave in such paradoxical ways that it is unlikely that extra-terrestrials would never in their wildest dreams be able to imagine the inhabitants of earth:

si d'ailleurs nous habitons la Lune, nous imaginerions-nous bien qu'il y eût ici-bas cette espèce bizarre de créatures qu'on appelle le genre humain? Pourrions-nous bien nous figurer quelque chose qui eût des passions si folles, et des réflexions si sages; une durée si courte, et des vues si longues, tant de science sur des choses presque inutiles, et tant d'ignorance sur les plus importantes?" (94)

And it is not only humans whose lives do not respect the rules of verisimilitude. When the philosopher describes a society of diligent workers ruled by a queen whose sole function is to have thousands of babies, the Marquise judges the account to be purely fictional: "Rentrons un peu dans le sens commun, si nous pouvons. De bonne foi où avez-vous pris tout ce roman-là? Quel est le poète qui vous l'a fourni?" (118). When the philosopher informs her that this is a description based on scientific observation of bee colonies, she can see how the science of natural history can expand the limits of her imagination. She uses the story of the bees, and the story of the silk worm the philosopher told earlier, to help imagine how inhabitants of other planets might be drastically different from humans: "N'y eût-il que les vers à soie, qui me sont plus connus que



n'étaient les abeilles, ils nous fourniraient des peuples assez surprenants, qui se métamorphoseraient de manière à n'être plus du tout les mêmes, qui ramperaient pendant une partie de leur vie, et voleraient pendant l'autre, et que sais-je moi?" (118).

By the end of the original five evenings of conversation, the Marquise has mastered the fundamental principles Cartesian cosmology. Rather than passively absorbing the information from her male instructor, she actively participates in the dialogue, and deduces the answers to her own questions. She even identifies an inconsistency in the Cartesian theory of *tourbillons*, for which the philosopher has no response. When she declares herself *savante*, however, the philosopher softens the term: "vous l'êtes assez raisonnablement, et vous l'êtes avec la commodité de pouvoir ne rien croire de tout ce que je vous ai dit dès que l'envie vous en prendra" (157). This qualification of the term *savante* assures that the Marquise will not be mistaken for the same kind of women mocked in Molière's *Les Femmes Savantes*. Niderst reads this moment as a reemergence of the pastoral ideal of leisure that has occurred through science: "lorsque dans la conclusion Fontenelle laisse la Marquise libre de tout oublier, c'est qu'il sait bien que le plus important demeurera: la modestie et la sérénité que lui a enseigné l'astronomie" (282). However, we can read this moment without undermining the Marquise's mastery of the science of astronomy, if we notice how it also undermines the notion of scientific knowledge as objective and unchanging. Instead of unquestionable scientific truths, Cartesian cosmology is a flexible system open to interpretation. It also points to a more flexible notion of verisimilitude that is elaborated in the final chapter of the *Entretiens*.

The subject of *vraisemblance* is central to the sixth and final “evening” of conversation, an additional chapter that Fontenelle added to the *Entretiens* starting with the second edition in 1687. The last chapter, whose subtitle announces that it will contain updated accounts of astronomical science, recounts a conversation that took place long after the philosopher’s initial visit to the Marquise. As the philosopher arrives for the second time at the Marquise’s country estate, he meets two representatives of polite society on their way out. The Marquise’s meeting with these two men leads her to believe that her entertainment of theories of astronomy and life on other planets may have ruined her for the social milieu of the *mondains*. In particular, it is the *invraisemblance* of these ideas that has potentially “gâté son esprit” (159). When she shares her ideas with the two worldly gentlemen, they believe she must be joking. The mutual respect upon which polite conversation is based breaks down, and the Marquise blames the philosopher for her lowered status in the eyes of her visitors: “Pourquoi m’avez-vous entêtée d’une chose que les gens qui m’estiment ne peuvent pas croire que je soutienne sérieusement?” (160). It seems at this moment as if Fontenelle’s quest to gain access for scientific discourse into high society may have failed. At the very least the Marquise’s mastery of the subject matter has been put into question. Her attempt to pass on her knowledge of the solar system to the two *mondains* fails because it does not meet their standards for verisimilitude. The philosopher responds by invoking a new social hierarchy, in which the followers of new science are members of an exclusive club, superior to the rest of the populace: “Contentons-nous d’être une petite troupe choisie qui les croyons, et ne divulguons pas nos mystères dans le peuple” (160). Thus he opposes a mixed-gender

group composed of himself, the Marquise, and anyone who believes in the possibility of life on other planets to the two “unreasonable” men who cannot accept anything that goes beyond the scope of their imagination. In Fontenelle’s redefined hierarchy, those at the top must be able to combine reason and imagination. Imagination assists the senses, helping the mind to conceive of things it cannot see. Imagination, combined with information gleaned from scientific observation of life on earth, establishes the verisimilitude of the idea of life on other planets:

vous ne pouvez pas demander qu’on vous les démontre comme l’on ferait une affaire mathématique; mais toutes les preuves qu’on peut souhaiter d’une pareille chose, vous les avez, la ressemblance entière des planètes avec la Terre qui est habitée, l’impossibilité d’imaginer aucun autre usage pour lequel elles eussent été faites, la fécondité et la magnificence de la nature [...] (162)

Both imagination and reason have limits, but if they are put together they open up new ways of understanding the world, ways that are not available to those amongst the ‘people’ who insist on simple verisimilitude.

In the sixth evening of conversation, the border between the gendered ways of knowing represented by the ‘savant’ philosopher and the Marquise, already weakened by the Marquise’s agency in the dialogue, and by the weaving together of the literary imaginary and the scientific, is all but dissolved. The Marquise reproaches the philosopher for not exposing her to a more rigorous explanation of theories of astronomy, one that might have better prepared her to respond to her skeptical visitors. The philosopher defends his approach to the material as a means to protect her from the

harshness of intellectual labor: “Je ne vous prouvais les choses [...] qu’avec de petits raisonnements doux, et accommodés à votre usage; en eussé-je employé d’aussi solides et d’aussi robustes, que si j’avois eu à attaquer un docteur?” (163) As the philosopher begins to explain updated theories, the Marquise requests that he stop altering his discourse to accommodate her gender: “Oui, dit-elle, prenez-moi présentement pour un docteur, et voyons cette nouvelle preuve du mouvement de la Terre” (163). Here, as elsewhere in the text, it is the Marquise who identifies herself with science, while the philosopher repeatedly attempts to move her back into a stereotypically feminine sphere.

The final conversation ends just as the first one began, with the philosopher seeming to reassert the boundaries between masculine and feminine ways of knowing. The superiority of moderns over ancients, the “génie” of contemporary Europe, is attributed to both the sciences and the humanities, but they are represented as separate, gendered fields corresponding to the *utile* and the *agréable*. This *génie* “ne se renferme pas dans les sciences et dans les spéculations sèches, il s’étend avec autant de succès jusqu’aux choses d’agrément [...] Ce sont celles-là, Madame, auxquelles il vous appartient de vous occuper, et qui doivent composer toute votre philosophie” (173). As we have seen in our discussion of Montpensier’s pastoral literature, women’s knowledge of “undomesticated” nature poses a threat to traditional gender identities, and one way to respond to this threat is to confine women to conventionally feminine activities and spaces. If there seems to be less room by the end of the *Entretiens* for a mixed-gender, pre-disciplinary approach that combines scientific and humanistic ways of knowing, it is perhaps a response to the threat posed by the Marquise. Already in a culturally superior

position to the philosopher, in becoming a “doctor” of natural philosophy, the Marquise deprives the philosopher of his intellectual superiority as well. Although the philosopher has the last word, we may reasonably imagine that the Marquise would resist, as she consistently does throughout their conversation, his attempt to push her away from the scientific towards the *agréable*. We can imagine that she would again invoke her preference for the complex version of the pastoral represented by the Chaldéens -- in which the scientific and humanistic forms of knowledge complement each other -- over the agreeable romantic pastoral of *L’Astrée*.

### **Conclusion**

In the quotation that opens this chapter, Voltaire accuses Fontenelle of being the purveyor of pastoral traps, of celebrating a false image of a lifestyle whose harsh realities he holds in disdain: “il vantait des soins qu’il craignait de connaître.” The debate over verisimilitude in pastoral literature in the context of the *querelle des anciens et des modernes* resonates with contemporary debates within ecocriticism. In the interest of avoiding the idyllicizing trap of pastoral, many ecocritics have come to value mimetic realism in literary treatments of nature. In connection with this move towards realism, ecocritics have sought to incorporate ecological scientific theories to provide them with tools to attend better to the material realities of nature. Instead of opening up the possibility of interdisciplinary conversation between scientific and literary discourses however, this practice implies that literature should imitate science in order to attain the same credibility as science. In my discussion of Fontenelle’s post-pastoral literature, we

have seen how he escapes pastoral traps through a different route than verisimilitude. In his work lies an important reminder of the common ground shared by science and literature, and of the equally valid contributions these disciplines can make to our understanding of nature and human nature.

In Fontenelle's theory of the pastoral, as articulated in the *Discours sur la Nature de l'Églogue*, and in his practice of the pastoral in his *Poésies Pastorales*, and the *Entretiens sur la Pluralité des Mondes*, he challenges conventional understandings of the kind of people and places pastoral literature should represent. While his work is often taken to represent the artificiality of pastoral representations of nature, I have attempted to show how these texts turn toward nature in a different way, so that they provide an example of how ecocriticism might respond to Dana Phillips's challenge to be "more imaginatively engaged with the earth as it is." While turning away from certain harsh realities of rural life, Fontenelle's *Poésies Pastorales* turns toward nature by pointing to the artificiality of social boundaries between country and court, and by painting a compelling picture of the inner nature that unites shepherds and nobles. At the same time that it breaks down barriers between court and country, the *Poésies* erodes the barriers between the world of the reader and the pastoral world of the eclogue, encouraging the reader to incorporate aspects of the text into their lives. The *Entretiens* also invites the reader to identify with its protagonist the Marquise, and to imitate the complex version of pastoral that she inhabits. The *Entretiens* turns toward nature by staging a mutually informative dialogue between scientific and literary ways of knowing the world. The philosopher's scientific explanations would not be complete without the literary

imaginary, and in turn scientific observation allows the imagination to go beyond the limits of what humans can see.

In the previous chapter's discussion of Montpensier's post-pastoral literature, we evoked the importance of considering the connection between discourses of nature and gender. While women's association with nature has often been used to justify their inferiority in relation to masculine culture, Montpensier's pastoral writes a different story, one in which nature is valued, and transformed into a powerful feminist space. The work of both Montpensier and Fontenelle demonstrates why we need the term "post-pastoral" to understand the potential of this often-devalued literary form to speak to contemporary concerns. Fontenelle's texts offer insight into a period before science and literature became gendered ways of knowing the world. In providing a model for how to value these discourses equally, Fontenelle's pastoral can be an important resource for contemporary ecocriticism.

For Montpensier and Fontenelle, representations of nature appear under the sign of modernity. They imagine not the static, unchanging nature of a lost Arcadia, but a dynamic, ever-evolving nature that uproots any possibility of fixed masculine or feminine identities. In the following chapter, I will explore how discourses of gender and nature come together in Rousseau's vision of a pastoral model for living. As a theory that considers the connections between ecocritical and feminist issues, the post-pastoral can illuminate what seems to be a paradox at the center of Rousseau's work; while his texts glorify nature, they also use nature to justify women's inferiority in a patriarchal system. Rousseau's *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) and *Émile ou de l'Éducation* both model

ideal “natural” feminine and masculine subjects that readers are encouraged to imitate.

While Rousseau’s views on women’s nature are in some respects reactionary, we will see that the unstable, ever-changing nature that emerges in these texts undermines any attempt to fix feminine or masculine identities. As in *Montpensier* and *Fontenelle*, the issue of labor in nature, particularly on the part of women, is a point of tension around which Rousseau’s complex version of pastoral is formed.



### Chapter Three

#### **Rousseau and the Post-Pastoral: Learning to be Natural in *Julie ou la Nouvelle***

#### ***Héloïse and Émile ou de l'Éducation***

On oublie son siècle et ses contemporains; on se transporte au temps des patriarches; on veut mettre soi-même la main à l'oeuvre, partager les travaux rustiques, et le bonheur qu'on y voit attaché. Ô temps de l'amour et l'innocence, où les femmes étaient tendres et modestes, où les hommes étaient simples et vivaient contents!

-- Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*

It is men who make Rousseau's journey from corrupted reason to nature. Rousseau's women never really make the journey; for them, unlike men, closeness to Nature is a natural state, not an achievement of reason.

-- Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason*

Of all of the work considered in this study, it is in the writing of Rousseau that we find the most explicit articulation of literary nature's capacity to inform and shape lived nature. As ecocritics work to show that potential solutions to environmental problems are not exclusively scientific, they might look to Rousseau as a guide for how to talk about the literary imaginary as a powerful catalyst of social transformation. The idyllic natural life represented in pastoral fiction can become reality, but humans need culture -- specifically literature -- to show them the way to nature. As we shall see in this chapter,

Rousseau's work demonstrates the post-pastoral function of art formulated by Terry Gifford: "Our art may be a mode of feeling our way back into a balanced relationship with external nature [...] This is the basis upon which the pastoral was founded. Arcadia was recognisably a literary construct -- nature as culture" (*Pastoral* 161-162). In previous chapters we have discussed the post-pastoral as a concept that allows us to recognize how literary imaginings of nature get beyond the dangers or traps that are associated with conventional pastoral literature. The primary trap identified by Marxist, feminist, and ecocritics alike is pastoral's presentation of an unhistoricized, idyllic nature that fails to deal with realities of class and gender inequality, and of environmental degradation.<sup>81</sup> Rousseau is often understood to be an advocate of a return to a romanticized state of nature where women are trapped in the domestic sphere.<sup>82</sup> However, reading through the lens of the post-pastoral helps us to identify places in Rousseau's texts where a more complicated vision of the nature/culture relationship is presented. As feminist philosopher Genevieve Lloyd notes, Rousseau is most interested in the masculine subject's journey from culture to nature; the feminine subject has nowhere to travel, as she is already located in nature. In this chapter I will argue that while Rousseau's conception of a gendered nature/culture dualism undergirds his patriarchal vision of society, his texts ultimately erode this dualism, along with the gender hierarchy it

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<sup>81</sup> See Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993), Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005).

<sup>82</sup> For example, see Susan Moller Okin, "Rousseau's Natural Woman," *The Journal of Politics* 41 (1979): 393-416, and Penny A. Weiss, "Rousseau, Antifeminism, and Woman's Nature," *Political Theory* 15.1 (February 1987): 81-98.

supports. The principal source of this erosion is the journey of Rousseau's feminine subject, which brings about the recognition, as ecofeminist Val Plumwood states, "that both men and women are part of both nature and culture" (35). As Rousseau understands feminine subjectivity to be grounded in nature, the story of women's journey to nature through culture would be doubly destabilizing. I trace this journey in *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) and *Émile ou de l'éducation* (1762), building on chapter one's discussion of how the concept of "traveling to nature" disrupts essentialized feminine identities at the same time that it recognizes nature's capacity to serve as a resource for the feminine subject. I have chosen to focus on these two novels because they contain Rousseau's most extensive account of women's nature, and because they are both presented as guides to the ideal natural life. In order to begin charting the journey of Rousseau's feminine subject, it is important to understand her point of departure. I turn first to a text in which Rousseau narrates the history of human-nature relationships, and attempts to immobilize women in an eternal state of nature while men continue on the path to alienation and culture.

In his *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* (1755), Rousseau travels to a pre-cultural state of nature to find support for his argument that inequality is a purely unnatural phenomenon. Based on the healthy physical and moral life of the first humans that he finds in this imaginary place, Rousseau establishes that all of the negative aspects of contemporary culture can be attributed to humanity's alienation from nature: "la plupart de nos maux sont notre propre ouvrage, et que nous les aurions presque tous évités en conservant la manière de vivre simple, uniforme et

solitaire, qui nous était prescrite par la nature” (53).<sup>83</sup> In the *Discours*, Rousseau tells the story of an ever-changing nature subject to the movements of history. However, there is one moment when he attempts to take this nature outside of history, to freeze human-nature relations when they reach what he sees as the perfect balance. This golden age comes after a “première révolution,” in which humans take the first step out of the pure state of nature. At this point, previously solitary and independent individuals begin to form stronger attachments to each other, and men and women come together in the first patriarchal families. This is the “temps des patriarches” that figures in Rousseau’s fiction as the ideal natural life, which Saint-Preux is moved to invoke at the sight of rural laborers in the above quotation from *Julie*, and that Émile’s natural education has prepared him to live out as an example to his contemporaries. This place where Rousseau would stop time is also the moment when he attempts to freeze woman’s nature, fixing her in place in the domestic sphere while men continue to circulate:

Ce fut alors que s’établit la première différence dans la manière de vivre des deux sexes, qui jusqu’alors n’en avaient qu’une. Les femmes devinrent plus sédentaires, et s’accoutumèrent à garder la cabane et les enfants, tandis que l’homme allait chercher la subsistance commune. (92)

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<sup>83</sup>*Discours sur l’origine et les fondements de l’inégalité parmi les hommes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965). The *Discours* is Rousseau’s response to an essay contest question posed by the *Académie de Dijon*: “Quelle est la source de l’inégalité parmi les hommes, et si elle est autorisée par la loi naturelle.” It was his first place essay in a previous contest sponsored by the *Académie*, the *Discours sur les science et les arts* (1749) (Paris: Gallimard, 1987) that first gained notoriety and celebrity for Rousseau, marking an important turning point in his career.

The “temps des patriarches” is where the journey ends for women in the *Discours*. While men continue down the path of alienation, women remain close to nature. In Rousseau’s discussions of women’s nature throughout his body of work, he points to the golden age patriarchal family as proof that women do not belong in the cultural sphere.

In the *Discours*, Rousseau argues for the relevance of imaginary nature, of “un état qui n’existe plus, qui n’a peut-être point existé, qui probablement n’existera jamais, et dont il est pourtant nécessaire d’avoir des notions justes pour juger de notre présent” (33). For Rousseau, whether or not humans ever experienced life as he describes it in the state of nature is unimportant; an encounter with nature in the literary imaginary prompts readers to think critically about their own lifestyle. That nature is a destination arrived at through the cultural medium of literature points to the impossibility of a dualistic relationship between these two terms. Against the notion of a static ‘pure’ nature that exists in opposition to culture, the *Discours* tells the story of shifting relationships between humans and their natural environment, which are inextricably linked to social relations between humans, and between men and women. We have discussed in previous chapters how the depiction of a dynamic, politicized nature in pastoral texts is bound up with the depiction of strong female subjects. In the case of Montpensier’s pastoral, an undomesticated nature creates a textual environment for imagining alternative social and political roles for women, beyond that of wife and mother. The portrait of a universe in constant motion described by the pastoral science of astronomy in Fontenelle’s *Entretiens* also creates an environment in which women actively engage in intellectual pursuits. We

shall see in Rousseau how an ever-changing nature undermines any attempt to define feminine subjectivity in opposition to masculine culture.

To a certain extent, the female protagonists of *Julie* and *Émile* correspond to the image of feminine subjectivity presented in the *Discours*' patriarchal golden age. Julie is one of Rousseau's most vocal advocates of the notion that gender roles are not socially constructed, but rooted in nature. It is Julie who educates her tutor Saint-Preux concerning the nature of gender difference: "L'attaque et la défense, l'audace des hommes, la pudeur des femmes ne sont point des conventions, comme le pensent tes philosophes, mais des institutions naturelles" (1:177). Furthermore, it is nature that destines men for manual labor and women for motherhood: "la destination de la nature n'étant pas la même, les inclinations, les manières de voir et de sentir doivent être dirigées de chaque côté selon ses vues, il ne faut point les mêmes goûts ni la même constitution pour labourer la terre et pour allaiter des enfants" (1:177). The occupations that women are 'naturally' predestined for are understood to be in opposition to masculine activity and agency. When Rousseau imagines the perfect partner for his ideal natural subject *Émile*, she is defined as the mirror image of his strength and independence. As nature has declared it, *Émile* will be strong and active, while *Sophie* will be a passive, dependent reflection of masculine desire:

L'un doit être actif et fort, l'autre passif et faible. Il faut nécessairement que l'un veuille et puisse; il suffit que l'autre résiste peu. Ce principe établi, il s'ensuit que la femme est faite spécialement pour plaire à l'homme [...] Ce n'est pas ici la loi de l'amour, j'en conviens; mais c'est celle de la nature, antérieure à l'amour-

même. (693)

Nature plays a more definitive role in shaping feminine identity than masculine identity; unlike men, women cannot move beyond the role dictated by their biological make-up: “Le mâle n’est mâle qu’en certains instants, la femelle est femelle toute sa vie ou du moins toute sa jeunesse. Tout la rappelle sans cesse à son sexe” (*Émile* 697). The same formula appears in Julie’s admonition of Saint-Preux: “tu me reproches d’avoir été de mon sexe une fois en ma vie, comme si jamais une femme devait cesser d’en être?” (1:177). However, as we shall see Julie and Sophie cannot be located within the place designated for them by Rousseau’s nature. Despite the fact that Rousseau invests a great deal of energy insisting on the distance between nature and culture, feminine and masculine, *Julie* and *Émile* enact a post-pastoral collapsing of these dualisms.

As a theory that considers the connections between ecocritical and feminist issues in literary representations of nature, the post-pastoral can create a dialogue between two critical approaches to Rousseau’s nature that often appear to have irreconcilable differences. When we compare ecocritical and feminist readings of Rousseau’s ideas of nature we get to one of the paradoxes at the center of Rousseau’s thought. Rousseau is often read as an advocate for nature, a proto-environmentalist, but he uses women’s supposed proximity to nature to justify their inferiority and immobility within a patriarchal system. While the enormous diversity of results yielded by critics working within each of these two frameworks makes it impossible to generalize about their character, one broad statement seems to apply to all ecocritical and feminist treatments of Rousseau; they have thus far not engaged with each other. Exhibiting a kind of de

Manian “blindness,” critics interested in reading Rousseau as a proto-environmentalist tend to omit any analysis of the problematic gender politics of Rousseau’s nature.<sup>84</sup> In turn, feminist critics have made the negative aspects of Rousseau’s nature their primary concern. Ecocritics and feminist critics have different understandings of where the concept of ‘nature’ itself takes us, and in particular where nature takes women. Can Rousseau’s nature move contemporary ecocriticism forward, or is it a dangerously regressive concept used to justify the exclusion of women from the cultural sphere?

These two kinds of reading correspond roughly to two distinct discourses of nature identified by feminist philosopher Kate Soper as “nature-endorsing,” where “the emphasis falls on the independence and intrinsic value of nature,” as opposed to a “nature-skeptical” discourse that “emphasizes the role of culture in the creation of what we term ‘nature’” (61-62).<sup>85</sup> Soper argues that there is something antithetical between a discourse that posits nature as material reality, and one that is concerned with the dangerous consequences of naturalized social hierarchies. In this chapter I use the theory of the post-pastoral to demonstrate that “nature endorsing” ecocritical readings of Rousseau and predominantly “nature-skeptical” feminist readings need not be understood to be in conflict. Rousseau’s ideas about the cultural labor necessary for the formation of the natural subject can enrich the argument of ecocritics considering Rousseau’s proto-environmentalism as well as that of feminist critics seeking to counter the power of the

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<sup>84</sup> See Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971).

<sup>85</sup> See Kate Soper, “Representing Nature,” *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* 9.4 (December 1998): 61-62. See also Kate Soper, *What is Nature: Culture, Politics, and the non-Human* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).



nature to essentialize feminine subjectivity. While both feminist and ecocritical discussions of Rousseau have raised the issue of the complexity of the nature/culture relationship in Rousseau, they have not considered that despite this complexity there may exist common ground between the two kinds of criticism. The articulation of a strong female subject is bound up with the recognition of nature as an active, animated subject that is more than culture's mirror image.

### **Rousseau and Ecocriticism**

Environmental historians and ecocritics have credited Rousseau with initiating a positive change of attitude towards nature that continues to inform contemporary environmentalism.<sup>86</sup> Even before the formal emergence of ecocriticism, studies of works like *Julie*, *Émile*, and *Les Rêveries du Promeneur Solitaire* noted how these texts moved nature into the foreground in unprecedented ways, redefining the human-nature relationship. One of the passages that critics have singled out is Saint-Preux's description of the Alps in *Julie*. In this passage the mountain range that once figured the hostility of the external environment towards humans becomes instead a breathtaking source of

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<sup>86</sup> In "Rousseau and the European Roots of Environmentalism," *Environmental History Review* 14.4 (1990): 41-72, Gilbert LaFrenière deplores contemporary environmentalist movements' lack of engagement with Rousseau's ideas, which "deserve serious consideration as a model of a complete, holistic outlook towards nature and humanity's relationship to nature" (42). He places Rousseau at the origins of environmentalist philosophy in his book *The Decline of Nature: Environmental History and the Western Worldview* (Palo Alto: Academia Press, 2008). See also David Pepper, *The Roots of Modern Environmentalism* (Dover: Croom Helm, 1984) and Marcel Schneider, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau et l'Espoir Écologiste* (Paris: Éditions Pygmalion, 1978).

inspiration.<sup>87</sup> As Saint-Preux walks through the mountains, he is physically and emotionally uplifted by his natural surroundings: “sur les hautes montagnes où l’air est pur et subtil, on se sent plus de facilité dans la respiration, plus de légèreté dans le corps, plus de sérénité dans l’esprit” (1:124). This passage is just one example of how Rousseau establishes a connection between the inner nature of individuals and their natural environment. In the *Rêveries*, nature becomes a privileged site for the cultivation of self-knowledge. Only pastoral retreat provides the conditions necessary for self-discovery, a project that demands “de longues et paisibles méditations que la société ne souffre pas” (61). The pleasures of his life in bucolic solitude lead Rousseau to reflect on human’s lack of appreciation for their environment, as evidenced by activities like mining: “Les visages hâves des malheureux qui languissent dans les infectes vapeurs des mines, de noirs forgerons [...] sont le spectacle que l’appareil des mines substitue, au sein de la terre, à celui de la verdure et des fleurs, du ciel azuré, des bergers amoureux et des laboureurs robustes, sur sa surface (129). In opposition to scientific and industrial explorations which have “un motif d’intérêt ou de vanité,” the *Rêveries* advocates personal communing with the natural world. In the depersonalized spaces of cities and academies, the leisurely activity that anyone can enjoy during a walk through the

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<sup>87</sup> Alfred Biese describes *La Nouvelle Héloïse* as “The most epoch-making event in European feeling for Nature [...] Rousseau’s influence upon feeling in general, and feeling for Nature in particular, was an extraordinary one, widening and deepening at once. By his strong personal impulse he impelled it into more natural paths,” *The Development of the Feeling for Nature* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1905) 274. For more studies of the impact of the representation of nature in *Julie* in particular see Mary Ellen Birkett, “Rousseau and the Poetry of Mountaineering,” in *Essays on the Literature of Mountaineering*, Armand Singer, ed. (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 1982), and Daniel Mornet, *Le Sentiment de la Nature en France, de Jean-Jacques Rousseau à Bernardin de Saint-Pierre* (Paris: Slatkine, 1907).

countryside becomes “denatured” (132). Instead of seeing plants and animals as possessing inherent value, as objects of scientific study they are valued only for their potential utility for humans: “on ne voit dans les plantes que des instruments de nos passions” (132). In the original state of nature that Rousseau describes in the *Discours*, humans did not yet think of themselves as separate from or superior to animals. Rousseau reasons that, based on their similarity, both animals and humans have “le droit de n’être point maltraitée inutilement par l’autre” (*Discours* 30).

For many critics, Rousseau’s environmentalism is understood to be synonymous with his Romanticism.<sup>88</sup> Rousseau is one of the most well-known representatives of this artistic movement that advocated a more personal, emotional connection with nature. Rousseau’s romantic adoration is presented as a positive move away from the supposedly “mechanistic” conception of nature relationship developed during the Enlightenment. As D.G. Charlton writes:

More than any other French writer of the century Rousseau discerned and expressed a sense of the potential harmony between man and nature [...] the notion of nature as a mechanism, as a divinely-designed order, perfect in its essentially passive regularity, gradually yielded, in some minds at least, to a notion of a no less divinely-intended harmony between two creative, developing ‘organisms’ -- man and the natural world. (37)

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<sup>88</sup> For a study of the connections between Romanticism and environmentalism see Laurence Coupe, *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism* (London: Routledge, 2000).

As mentioned earlier, many first-wave ecocritical studies pointed to Descartes and Bacon as the culprits responsible for instigating a disconnection between culture and nature that justifies exploitative treatment of the nonhuman world. Stephen Bronner's discussion of Rousseau in *Ideas in Action* provides a representative example of this narrative:

“Descartes had severed mind from body, spirit from nature, and the human from the animal. In keeping with Francis Bacon and Isaac Newton, no less than René Descartes, Hobbes and Locke increasingly saw nature as atomic, inert, and reducible to its constituent empirical parts. Rousseau, perhaps most notably, tried to reverse the trend” (266). More recently, however, ecocritics have challenged this view on the grounds that it posits a romanticized pre-Cartesian harmony between humans and nature, and overlooks the complexity of Cartesian and Baconian theory.<sup>89</sup> Ecocritics and environmentalists more broadly have agreed that looking back to a lost Arcadia is not an effective way to cultivate environmental awareness. Some ecocritics have turned to Rousseau to respond to those who cast environmentalism as an anti-humanist, anti-modern movement.<sup>90</sup>

Rousseau himself responds to this kind of critique in his *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité*. Rousseau makes it clear that in praising the state of nature he is not advocating regression to a more primitive era: “Quoi donc! Faut-il détruire les sociétés,

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<sup>89</sup> See for example Greg Garrard *Ecocriticism* (New York: Routledge, 2004), and Val Plumwood *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>90</sup> A notable example of the critique against environmentalism is Luc Ferry's *Le Nouvel Ordre Ecologique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). He singles out deep ecology and ecofeminism in particular as dangerous movements “guided by a hatred of the present” (89). Rousseau is an important figure in Ferry's argument that human civilization should be understood as separate from and superior to the natural world: “Rousseau was the first to draw the consequences of the Cartesian distinction between animals and men for the emergence of a world of distinctively human culture” (4).

anéantir le tien et le mien et retourner vivre dans les forêts avec les ours?” He acknowledges that any such return is impossible for cultural subjects, “hommes semblables à moi dont les passions ont détruit pour toujours l’originelle simplicité, qui ne peuvent plus se nourrir d’herbe et de gland, ni se passer de lois et de chefs” (Note 7). Moving beyond Rousseau’s romanticist glorification of nature, scholars have pointed to the complex negotiation of nature/culture relationship present in his work as evidence of a forward-looking, progressive environmental philosophy. Among these critics who have attempted to use Rousseau’s work to breathe new life into environmentalist movements are Jonathan Lane, Jr. and Andrew Biro. Both focus on what I have called Rousseau’s “post-pastoral” embrace of cultural means to natural ends. For Lane, environmental philosophy can learn from the way in which Rousseau breaks down the distinction between nature and culture: “Anyone seeking to profoundly reform human interaction with the natural world must consider why Rousseau praises the natural state, and yet is ultimately committed to recovering human happiness and environmental sustainability through means that are, by his own account, distinctly unnatural” (5). Lane argues that adopting Rousseau’s approach could be particularly useful to deep ecology, a branch of environmentalist philosophy that is often labeled as reactionary and anti-humanist. Deep ecology, founded by Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess in the early seventies, sees anthropocentrism as the principal cause of environmental degradation.<sup>91</sup> Among the most vocal critics of deep ecology are ecofeminists, who argue that it does not account for the

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<sup>91</sup> See Arne Naess, “The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement,” *Inquiry* 16 (1973): 95-100, and *The Deep Ecology Movement: An Introductory Anthology*, Alan Drengson and Yuichi Inoue, eds. (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1995).

connection between social oppression of humans and human destruction of nature. In its attempt to correct for anthropocentrism, ecofeminists argue, deep ecology dangerously oversimplifies the category of ‘human,’ without consideration of race, gender, or social class.<sup>92</sup> In Rousseau’s rejection of the idea of a return to a ‘pure’ nature, and his embrace of a solution that works with culture, his work points to how ecological thinking must engage with contemporary society. Rather than relying on a romantic notion of spontaneous human attachment to nature, Lane argues that it is useful to acknowledge, along with Rousseau, that some art is necessary in the formation of ecologically minded subjects (20).

Like Lane, Andrew Biro sees great potential for Rousseau’s ideas to inform a new kind of ecological movement, a “denaturalized” ecological politics that gets beyond the trap of a romanticized conception of nature. For Biro, Rousseau’s recognition of how culture participates in the formation of the natural subject points should be central to postmodern ecological politics.<sup>93</sup> What makes Rousseau relevant to contemporary ecological politics according to Biro is his conception of a natural state that is not static but dynamic and historicized. Instead of campaigning for a return to some nature of the

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<sup>92</sup> For a detailed discussion of the conflict between ecofeminism and deep ecology, see Ariel Salleh, “Deeper Than Deep Ecology: The Ecofeminist Connection,” *Environmental Ethics* 6 (1984): 339-345, “The Ecofeminism/Deep Ecology Debate: A Reply to Patriarchal Reason,” *Environmental Ethics* 14 (1992): 195-216, and for a pro-deep ecology response, see Robert Sessions, “Deep Ecology versus Ecofeminism: Healthy Differences or Incompatible Philosophies?” *Hypatia* 6.1 (Spring 1991): 90-107.

<sup>93</sup> See especially “Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Modernity and the Historicization of Alienation,” in Andrew Biro, *Denaturalizing Ecological Politics: Alienation from Nature from Rousseau to the Frankfurt School and Beyond* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005) 59-82.

past, and fighting for the conservation and preservation of ‘untouched’ nature, environmentalism needs to reflect the constantly evolving human-nature relationship.

### **Feminism and Rousseau’s Nature**

Starting with the first critiques of Rousseau made by his contemporaries, feminists have identified his problematic use of nature to justify his views on women.<sup>94</sup> Many of these critiques were provoked by Rousseau’s program for female education in the fifth book of *Émile*. In her *Lettres sur les Ouvrages et le Caractère de Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (1789), Mme de Staël takes issue with the way in which Rousseau’s model of female education reinforces what he understands to be women’s natural weaknesses: “Rousseau voulait élever la femme comme l’homme, d’après la nature et suivant les différences qu’elle a mises entr’eux: mais je ne sais pas s’il faut tant la seconder, en fortifiant, pour ainsi dire, les femmes dans leur faiblesse” (62). In her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Mary Wollstonecraft rejects altogether Rousseau’s notion that natural differences between the sexes should lead to different educations: “women, considered not only as moral, but rational creatures, ought to endeavor to acquire human virtues (or perfections) by the same means as men, instead of being educated like a fanciful kind of half being-- one of Rousseau’s wild chimeras (43). While some studies explain away Rousseau’s gender politics as merely representative of prevailing attitudes of the time, Rousseau had many contemporary critics. The diatribe in his *Lettre à*

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<sup>94</sup> For a survey of Rousseau’s female contemporaries’ reactions to his work, see Mary Seidman Trouille, *Sexual Politics in the Enlightenment: Women Writers Read Rousseau* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997).

*d'Alembert sur les spectacles* (1758) about the corrupting power of unnatural women determined to circulate in society rather than fulfilling their domestic role provoked rebuttals from Jean d'Alembert and Jean François Marmontel.<sup>95</sup>

Two of the first twentieth-century feminist critics of Rousseau, Lynda Lange and Susan Moller Okin, called attention to the lack of scholarship on Rousseau's treatment of women, raising the difficult question of how to reconcile Rousseau's views on women with other aspects of his political thought.<sup>96</sup> Lange characterizes the first feminist readings of Rousseau as stemming from a desire to make visible an inconsistency that "seemed to cry out for exposure of the great 'egalitarian' father of republican revolution" (2). Critics have dealt with the paradox of Rousseau's sexual politics in various ways. Some attempt to separate Rousseau's views on gender from his general philosophy, thus avoiding the inconsistencies altogether. In a recently published book on Rousseau's politics, Joshua Cohen prefaces his discussion with the admission that he will get around the issue of gender through a somewhat artificial but necessary abstraction: "I have assumed here -- assumed but not argued -- that it is possible to provide a reconstruction of important elements of Rousseau's political philosophy while simply abstracting from his view that natural sexual differences are of decisive social significance" (6). Other critics such as Joel Schwartz identify aspects of Rousseau's views on gender that can be

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<sup>95</sup> See Jean d'Alembert, "Lettre à M. Rousseau," and Jean François Marmontel "Apologie du théâtre" in *Oeuvres complètes de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, vol. 2 (Paris: 1824). While Marmontel is concerned with responding to Rousseau's critique of theater, he also refutes Rousseau's idea of women's natural roles by giving historical and political reasons for their exclusion from the public sphere.

<sup>96</sup> See Susan Moller Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), and Lynda Lange, "Rousseau and Modern Feminism," *Social Theory and Practice* 7.3 (1981): 245-77.



reconciled with his egalitarian politics, especially ideas of complementarity and interdependence in relationships between the sexes. According to Schwartz's reading of Rousseau, women's powers are different from, but not inferior to, those powers that Rousseau accords men.<sup>97</sup> Finding these attempts to separate or reconcile Rousseau's views on women from his more general philosophy unconvincing, feminist critics have identified nature as a problematic critical concept at the foundation of all of Rousseau's thinking.

Joan Landes has explored how Rousseau's construction of a gendered nature/culture duality is mapped onto his notion of the private and public spheres. Women are excluded from political activity and confined to a depoliticized domestic sphere based on their proximity to nature.<sup>98</sup> Rousseau's whole political project depends on the sacrifice of women's freedom: "The price of the virtuous republic of laws, and with it the probability that the theoretical public of men will establish principles of general welfare, is the silencing of women, their banishment to the domestic sphere" (89).

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<sup>97</sup> Joel Schwartz, *The Sexual Politics of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984). Schwartz's positive interpretation of Rousseau's sexual politics has attracted feminist critique. The most extensive argument against Schwartz's ideas of women's power in Rousseau can be found in Penny Weiss, *Gendered Community: Rousseau, Sex and Politics* (New York: New York University Press, 1993).

<sup>98</sup> See Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988). Landes shows how Rousseau genders the distinction between absolute monarchy and republic. He casts the absolutist public sphere as feminine, artificial and decadent, while bourgeois public sphere of the republic is exclusively masculine. For Landes, it is with Rousseau that "women's virtue acquires a spatial dimension. Her confinement to the private realm functions as a public sign of her political virtue" (69).

Similarly, the deaths of Rousseau's female protagonists Julie and Sophie are read as sacrifices necessary for the preservation of the ideal patriarchal society.<sup>99</sup>

It is significant to feminist critics that, according to Rousseau's own vision of the state of nature in the *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité*, the hierarchical relationship between men and women occurs only after humanity makes the first move away from nature. Woman's dependence on man is thus revealed to be a social construction according to Rousseau's own theory.<sup>100</sup> His oppressive definition of the feminine is undermined by the highly unstable definition of his concept of nature, particularly of women's nature. The dangerous force of the woman-nature association is weakened in light of the observation that nature is whatever Rousseau needs it to be in order to legitimize his argument about the proper place of women. Okin notes that this "functionalist" definition of nature and women's nature is not limited to Rousseau, but can be extended to Western philosophy in general: "Woman's nature, by contrast to man's has been overwhelmingly dictated by the economic structure favored by the philosopher; it is defined as what best suits her role within that society" (395). Sarah Kofman and Penelope Deutscher have both looked at how the instability of Rousseau's definition of nature serves his phallogentrism. According to Kofman, like anyone claiming to speak for nature, Rousseau is really speaking for himself. His agenda is exposed when he describes feminine identity as being grounded in nature, but at the same time prescribed by social convention:

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<sup>99</sup> See Judith Shklar, *Men and Citizens*, and Okin, "The Fate of Rousseau's Heroines," *Feminist Interpretations of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, Lynda Lange, ed. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002) 89-112.

<sup>100</sup> On this point see especially Okin "Rousseau's Natural Woman."

Rousseau slides from an insistence on women's reticence to a demand for female seclusion, from feminine reserve to the confinement of the feminine on a reservation. In this slippage Rousseau repeats a familiar social operation of masculine domination. Under the pretext of giving back nature her suppressed voice and of defending Nature's ends, what is really being advocated, as always, are the phallocratic ends of man. (237)

Kofman, Linda Zerilli and others have argued that it is fear of the feminine that motivates Rousseau to invest so much energy maintaining the separation between nature and culture, and between women and men. And the source of his anxiety is the knowledge that these categories are socially constructed, not based in nature: "What Rousseau teaches and fears is that natural man and woman are pedagogical constructions, and highly unstable ones at that" (Zerilli 279). If gender is learned, not dictated by nature, it is never complete (Marso, *Unmanly Citizens* 37). In a gesture that demonstrates what Stacy Alaimo has called feminist theory's "flight from nature," feminist readings of Rousseau attempt to distance women from a devalued nature by revealing that Rousseau's nature is merely a cultural construct.

However, some critics have located feminist potential in Rousseau by pointing to the complex relationship between such categories as nature/culture and private/public in his work. For Lange, while Rousseau does not overturn any of these dualisms, he does the important work of opening them up for reconsideration. Rousseau's foregrounding of the domestic sphere, and his understanding of the dependence of the political on the personal, represent a contribution to contemporary feminism. As Lange writes, "what is

ultimately important for the development of feminist political philosophy is not the specific conclusions of a given work, but the topics that are admitted to be relevant” (Introduction 7). Lesley Walker argues that Rousseau’s understanding of women’s domestic work as cultural labor allowed women to be recognized as making an essential contribution to the political project of the enlightenment.<sup>101</sup> Genevieve Lloyd points out that the gendered reason/nature dualism associated with the Cartesian mind/body split is undermined in Rousseau’s work: “Rousseau repudiated dichotomies between pure thought and bodily passions or sensuousness [...] in favor of a view of reason as continuous with and guided by Nature” (78). Proximity to nature is not seen to be in opposition with reason, and nature is not consistently devalued in relation to culture. For Lloyd, it is essential that feminists attend to the productive potential of this unstable relationship between nature and culture in Rousseau. Rather than targeting nature as a dangerous association for women, feminist critique should deconstruct the notion that culture must exist in opposition to the feminine. Building on the work of Lloyd, Alice Ormiston argues that Rousseau’s work contains the potential for the development of a feminist concept of the citizen. Like Lloyd, she feels that before the feminist potential within Rousseau’s work can be recognized, we must attend to the places in his work where the nature/culture dualism is broken down. Rousseau offers a model of citizenship,

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<sup>101</sup> See Lesley Walker, *A Mother’s Love: Crafting Feminine Virtue in Enlightenment France* (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 2008). For another discussion of the political importance of Rousseau’s domestic reform see Nicole Fermon, *Domesticating Passions: Rousseau, Woman and Nation* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1997). Jennifer Popiel makes a similar argument in *Rousseau’s Daughters: Domesticity, Education, and Autonomy in Modern France* (Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2008).

of a kind of participation in the public sphere that is not predicated on the exclusion of the natural and the feminine: “the identity of the virtuous male citizen is not constituted against woman as other, but precisely as the synthesis of what has been constructed as a male and a female principle -- reason and feeling, law and instinct” (151).

The work of Walker, Lloyd and Ormiston points to how the concept of nature does not have to work against women. In reading Rousseau through the lens of the post-pastoral, this is what I hope to establish; culture, and all of the values traditionally associated with it—masculinity, rationality, labor—does not have to be defined as the opposite of nature, femininity, sentimentality and leisure. We have seen how both ecocritics and feminist critics have identified aspects of Rousseau’s conception of nature that undermine the gendered nature/culture dualism. Through an exploration of the complexity of the nature/culture relationship in Rousseau, both ecocritics and feminists have identified aspects of his work that can serve their respective projects. In attending to the post-pastoral aspects of *Julie* and *Émile*, we will see how discourses of nature and discourses of gender can inform each other, leading to a new understanding of Rousseau’s work, and of the kind of work that pastoral literature can do.

*Julie* and *Émile* have both been read as Rousseau’s attempts to resolve the conflict between nature and culture that he posits in the *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* and the *Discours sur l’origine de l’inégalité*.<sup>102</sup> In these texts, Rousseau argues that culture or

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<sup>102</sup> This is Jean Starobinski’s reading of nature and culture in Rousseau, informed by Kant’s essay “Conjectures on the Beginning of Human History” and Ernst Cassirer, *The Question of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*. See Starobinski, *La Transparence et l’obstacle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), and Laurence Cooper, *Rousseau, Nature, and the Problem of the Good Life* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999).

social institutions corrupt ideal nature, but humans need culture in order to create a society that comes as close as possible to the state of nature. In *La Transparence et l'obstacle*, one of the most influential studies of Rousseau, Jean Starobinski describes this situation as the conflict between the perfect transparency and simplicity of the state of nature, and cultural obstacles that obscure and complicate this state. For Starobinski, *Julie* works out an uneasy compromise between nature and culture, “le spectacle d’une dialectique qui aboutit à une synthèse” (109). The tension between the natural love of Julie and Saint-Preux and the obstacles of culture is resolved in the patriarchal society of Clarens, the closest that contemporary society can get to the “temps des patriarches” of the *Discours*. The inhabitants of Clarens are social but they have discovered how to bypass the evils that normally come with alienation from nature; they are completely transparent to one another, just as Rousseau’s first humans were. The natural passion of Julie and Saint-Preux has been sublimated into a form no longer incompatible with culture. Laurence Cooper has argued that Clarens represents a successful reconciliation of nature and society, in which the “integrity” of each element is preserved.<sup>103</sup> As Starobinski notes, however, the model of natural living that Rousseau proposes in Clarens proves to be unsustainable. Julie’s death shatters the illusion of static natural happiness: “L’aventure ne se stabilise pas dans le bonheur idyllique de la société intime de Clarens. Julie meurt” (140).

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<sup>103</sup> Cooper makes a distinction between reconciliation of nature and society, which is possible, and reconciliation of that which is “consistent with nature” with that “in contradiction to nature,” which can never be reconciled in Rousseau (49-50). This distinction underpins Cooper’s argument that “the reconcilability of nature and society does not contradict Rousseau’s insistence upon the incompatibility of nature and citizenship” (50).

In *Émile*, Rousseau proposes a solution to the conflict between nature and culture that Starobinski (summarizing readings of *Émile* by Kant and Cassirer) labels “la synthèse par l’éducation” (46). The opposition between nature and culture is resolved through an education that creates natural subjects. *Émile* and Sophie are educated in a manner that allows them to live a life as close to nature as possible in society. Once again, however, the synthetic pastoral idyll in which *Émile* and his wife Sophie live cannot be maintained. In the unfinished sequel to *Émile*, *Émile et Sophie ou les Solitaires*, death appears on the scene to dispel the illusion that these “natural” characters are outside of history.

Moving beyond the question of whether or not Rousseau successfully resolves the dialectic that runs through all of his work, I propose to look at how Rousseau completely destabilizes the categories of nature and culture. In my readings of *Julie* and *Émile*, I focus on the instability of the nature/culture dualism, and explore how this instability opens up the possibility of masculine and feminine subjectivity that is connected to nature, but not limited by it. Because Rousseau uses nature to immobilize and contain feminine subjectivity, the journeys of the female protagonists in these two texts are particularly destabilizing.

The lives of Rousseau’s ideal women Julie and Sophie are similar in many ways. Both Julie and Sophie become ideal mothers and wives. Both are model women who carry out the duties prescribed by Rousseau’s nature. Their lives are both cut tragically short, and their deaths disrupt the domestic idyll. Feminist critics have attributed their deaths to the impossible demands imposed on them in the name of nature: “though ideals

of their sex, they cannot be allowed to live in the patriarchal world, since there is no way they can fulfill the totally contradictory expectations it places on them” (Okin 110).

Women are expected to be passionate and modest at the same time, living only to satisfy the often conflicting desires of the men in their life, in Julie’s words: “dire toujours autrement qu’on ne pense; déguiser tout ce qu’on sent; être fausse par devoir, et mentir par modestie: voila l’état habituel de toute fille de mon âge. On passe ainsi ses beaux jours sous la tyrannie des bienséances” (1:268). Unable to sublimate their desire or abandon their duty towards their families, Sophie and Julie are left with no other option but death. Feminist critics have used this reading of Julie’s death to demonstrate that synthesis of nature and culture is not possible for women; women must be sacrificed in order to allow men to reconcile their natural freedom to their cultural obligations.<sup>104</sup> However, as we will see, the death of Julie and Sophie reveals the impossibility of synthesis for masculine or feminine subjects, as well as the impossibility of fixing masculine or feminine identity in a static notion of nature and culture.

### **Modeling Natural Living: *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse***

In the two prefaces that frame Rousseau’s epistolary novel *Julie*, the novel figures as a cultural tool that will enable readers to travel to nature. The first and second preface lay out the geographic and moral distance that Rousseau hopes cultured readers will cover with the help of the text; as they read, they will be compelled to imitate the image

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<sup>104</sup> See Leah Bradshaw, “Rousseau on Civic Virtue, Male Autonomy and the Construction of the Divided Female” in *Feminist Interpretations of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* 65-88.



of pastoral life shared by Julie, her husband Wolmar, and her former lover Saint-Preux: “Comment pourraient-ils y contempler le tableau d’un ménage si heureux, sans vouloir imiter un si doux modèle?” (2:407) However, throughout the text the distinction between nature and culture-- between the protagonists and the reader, between the country and the city-- is constantly undermined, so that it is difficult to tell where nature ends and culture begins. In the first preface, *Julie*’s “editor” speaks to the reader, creating ambiguity concerning the fictional or non-fictional status of the world the letters present by refusing to reveal whether he simply compiled the letters or whether he composed them.<sup>105</sup> It is certain, however, that he has intervened in some way in their production: “j’ai travaillé moi-même à ce livre, et je ne m’en cache pas” (1:71). This information is enough to dispel the illusion that *Julie* might represent unmediated contact with a pure product of nature, the actual words of two naïve residents of a small rural village. At the same time, the editor distances himself from the letters’ authors, aligning himself with the cultured reader who he assumes will share his ability to recognize the uncultivated writing style of the novel’s provincial protagonists:

Quiconque veut se résoudre à lire ces lettres doit s’armer de patience sur les fautes de langues, sur le style emphatique et plat, sur les pensées communes rendues en termes ampoulés; il doit se dire d’avance que ceux qui les écrivent ne sont pas des

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<sup>105</sup> For a study of eighteenth-century reader reactions to *Julie*, see Nicholas Paige, “Rousseau’s Readers Revisited: The Aesthetics of *La Nouvelle Héloïse*,” (*Eighteenth-Century Studies* 42.1 (Fall 2008): 131-154, and Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre* (New York: Basic Books, 1984). Based on readers’ letters to Rousseau, Darnton concludes that readers generally believed in the authenticity of the correspondence in *Julie*. Paige critiques this view, arguing that while readers were clearly transported by the novel, they understood Rousseau to be the author of the letters.

Français, des beaux-esprits, des académiciens, des philosophes; mais des provinciaux, des étrangers, des solitaires, de jeunes gens, presque des enfants, qui dans leurs imaginations romanesques prennent pour de la philosophie les honnêtes délires de leur cerveau. (1:72)

In the prefaces and throughout the novel, the editor undermines the opposition between nature and culture, one moment distancing himself from nature to align himself with the reader in passing harsh judgments on the characters, the next aligning himself with the characters to criticize the corrupt culture of his readers. If the cultured reader experiences disdain in encountering the rustic style of the letters, this is evidence that they need to read in order to be cured of their corruption. The journey to nature that *Julie* offers can be particularly useful for women readers: “Il peut même être utile à celles qui dans une vie dérégulée ont conservé quelque amour pour l’honnêteté” (1:72).

In the second preface, the “Entretien sur les romans, entre l’éditeur et un homme de lettres,” Rousseau the editor comes down more clearly on the side of nature, defending his novel against the criticisms of a man of letters, the voice of culture, identified as “N.” Reinforcing the dualisms laid out in the first preface, N. launches into a series of disqualifications that make *Julie* unsuitable for cultured readers, all of which rely on rigid nature/culture and female/male binaries. He begins by insisting on the incommensurable gap between nature and culture, between the worlds of the characters and the readers. In the notes to his edition of *Julie*, Henri Coulet confirms that N.’s characterization of Julie and Saint-Preux as “des gens de l’autre monde” is unmistakably pejorative; the assertion of difference is necessarily the assertion of inequality (2:564). This world is insignificant

to the public because of its fiercely personal, private nature: “Qu’apprend-on dans la petite sphère de deux ou trois Amants ou Amis toujours occupés d’eux seuls?” (2: 397). N. complains about the extremely ordinary, unremarkable, *natural* quality of the novel’s events: “des événements si naturels, si simples qu’ils le sont trop [...] Est-ce la peine de tenir registre de ce que chacun peut voir tous les jours dans sa maison, ou dans celle de son voisin?” (2:396). The realm of the natural, the everyday, the interior, or the domestic is not noteworthy and should be relegated to the background behind culture’s “coup de Théâtre.” N.’s critique culminates with a disparaging association with the pastoral:

Un homme qui vit dans le monde ne peut s’accoutumer aux idées extravagantes, au pathos affecté, au déraisonnement continu de vos bonnes gens [...] Tout ce qui pourrait arriver de plus heureux serait qu’on prît votre petit bonhomme pour un Céladon, votre Édouard pour un D. Quichotte, vos caillettes pour deux Astrées, et qu’on s’en amusât comme d’autant de vrais fous. (2: 402)

The worldly reader cannot connect to the unreasonable, emotional, feminine universe of the pastoral novel, and this impossibility makes it unlikely that he will be able to apply its principles in his own life. *L’Astrée* and *Don Quichotte* in this context might be understood as models for a kind of dysfunctional reading, in which the reader cannot appropriately apply anything from the text to real life, and thus engages with it only superficially. We might also take these works to stand for a critique of pastoral literature that invokes the ridiculous consequences of readers confusing an idealization of nature with real nature, fiction with non-fiction. Starobinski invokes these two texts to describe how Rousseau gets around the kind of trap that *Don Quichotte* and *L’Astrée* set for

readers, “la chimère de toutes les tentatives qui, à un moment neuf de l’histoire, prétendent revivre la fiction d’un âge antécédent” (407). Along with Starobinski, I would argue that instead of longing for a lost past, Rousseau’s text focuses on the present and on how to bring lived experience in line with the literary imaginary. As Starobinski notes, Rousseau works to create a more manageable gap between the novel and real life, making the journey to nature seem more feasible for readers, “réalisable au prix d’un dépaysement relativement limité” (407).<sup>106</sup>

If Rousseau is interested in inciting movement in urban audiences, he hopes that rural readers of *Julie* will be inspired to stay exactly where they are. *Julie* will provide a corrective to a literary tradition that consistently devalues the natural while glorifying the cultural. Seeing their way of life mocked or ignored in literature, Rousseau fears that people living in the country will abandon their farms for the false pleasures of the city:

Quel effet produiront de pareils tableaux sur un gentilhomme de campagne, qui voit railler la franchise avec laquelle il reçoit ses hôtes, et traiter de brutale orgie la joie qu’il fait régner dans son canton? Sur sa femme qui apprend que les soins d’une mère de famille sont au-dessous des Dames de son rang? [...] Tous de concert ne voulant plus être des manants, se dégoûtent de leur village, abandonnent leur vieux château, qui bientôt devient mesure, et vont dans la capitale. (2: 403)

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<sup>106</sup> For Paige it is Rousseau’s insertion of aesthetic distance between text and reality that allows him to break with quixotic confusion. Rousseau “invented a new form of identification that permitted feeling to flow without raising the specter of Quixote’s madness [...] Rousseau’s aesthetic distance allows readers to get very close to the action without falling in” (“Rousseau’s Readers” 19).

Through the intervention of his novel, Rousseau intends to help already “natural” subjects open their eyes to the value of their way of life, and to help cultured subjects come into their natural selves. While the dualistic understanding of corrupt culture/innocent nature is important for Rousseau’s argument, it is equally important for him to establish that the distance between these two categories is traversable. The distance between the pastoral world of *Julie* and the world of the readers is broken down, and contrasted with the incommensurable distance between fiction and reality in novels like *L’Astrée*. It is upon recognizing this distinction between Rousseau’s pastoral and the pastoral tradition represented by d’Urfé’s *L’Astrée* that N. concedes that *Julie* could transform readers in a meaningful way:

Je comprends encore qu’il ne s’agit pas de faire des Daphnis, des Sylvandres, des Pasteurs d’Arcadie, des Bergers du Lignon [...] ni d’autres pareils êtres romanesques qui ne peuvent exister que dans les livres; mais de montrer aux gens aisés que la vie rustique et l’agriculture ont des plaisirs qu’ils ne savent pas connaître [...] qu’un homme de mérite qui voudrait se retirer à la campagne avec sa famille et devenir lui-même son propre fermier, y pourrait couler une vie aussi douce qu’au milieu des amusements des Villes. (2:405)

The two prefaces to *Julie* posit a dualistic relationship between nature and culture while at the same time undermining the distinction between these two categories. Bearing in mind that the goal of the text is to inspire reader transport, it can only succeed in achieving this by demonstrating that the pastoral world depicted in its pages is not so far away from the reader’s world. Furthermore, readers will be compelled to imitate the

novel's 'natural' protagonists if they can identify with them. Julie figures the compatibility of the natural and the cultural in ways that destabilize Rousseau's concept of the natural woman.

### **Julie's Nature**

Julie and Saint-Preux are both presented as 'natural' characters, located at a geographic and moral distance from cultured readers. Their romantic relationship is also figured as natural in that it exists in opposition to cultural convention. Julie's father, who objects to the relationship because of Saint-Preux's inferior social class, is one example of the cultural obstacles placed in the path of their natural desire.<sup>107</sup> The pastoral setting that facilitates many of their secret encounters reinforces the natural quality of their relationship. They share their first kiss in a grove of trees and formulate an ultimately unrealized plan of a "rendez-vous champêtre" in a rustic ch  let on the grounds of M. d'Orbe's estate. In a letter to Saint-Preux, Julie explains that she chose this pastoral location for their meeting because there the unnatural laws that keep them apart would be overruled by mother nature: "on n'y voit partout que les tendres soins de la M  re commune. C'est l   mon ami, qu'on n'est que sous ses auspices et qu'on ne peut   couter que ses lois" (1:162). For the same reason, Saint-Preux's noble friend Edouard proposes his estate as a setting that would sustain a love that has been declared impossible by society. He encourages them to go live out their lives in this pastoral state of nature:

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<sup>107</sup> Okin notes that as the masculine protagonists of Rousseau's texts do not have parents, only Rousseau's female characters are faced with the incompatibility of personal desire and family duty ("The Fate of Rousseau's Heroines" 110).

“L’odieux préjugé n’a point d’accès dans cette heureuse contrée. L’habitant paisible y conserve encore les moeurs simples des premiers temps” (1:254). As Mary McAlpin notes, the fact that Julie quickly becomes pregnant after consummating her relationship with Saint-Preux can be read as an additional sign that “these two lovers are the favored children of an ideal natural love” (136). And when the violence of Julie’s father causes her to lose the baby, culture intervenes once again to prohibit their union.<sup>108</sup>

Julie and the natural environment are often confounded in the loving gaze of Saint-Preux. The pedagogical relationship between tutor and student is first likened to that of a gardener and his landscape. In the spirit of eighteenth-century garden philosophy that saw the gardener as an artist striving to make his transformation of the landscape look as natural as possible, Saint-Preux describes his role as an educator in terms that make it clear that the student will not be “denaturalized.” His goal is simply “d’orner de quelques fleurs un si beau naturel” (1:73).<sup>109</sup> Keeping Julie’s education a secret from her father, supposedly in order to be able to surprise him later, also renders her education invisible, making it easier to maintain the appearance that no alteration of Julie’s nature has taken place. Whenever Saint-Preux is alone in a natural setting, he sees Julie. He writes to Julie from the idyllic Valais, “Tout me rappelait à vous dans ce séjour paisible; et les touchants attraits de la nature, et l’inaltérable pureté de l’air, et les moeurs simples

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<sup>108</sup> See Mary McAlpin, “Julie’s Breasts, Julie’s Scars: Physiology and Character in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*,” *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 36.1 (2007): 127-146.

<sup>109</sup> In *On Other Grounds: Landscape Gardening and Nationalism in Eighteenth-Century England and France* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001) Brigitte Weltman-Aron discusses the delicate balance between art and nature in eighteenth-century garden theory, as demonstrated in numerous gardening treatises of the period in which gardeners seek to underplay their intervention in their landscape designs (29).

des habitants [...] et tout ce qui frappait agréablement mes yeux et mon coeur leur peignait celle qu'ils cherchent" (1:130). Later in the novel, when Saint-Preux watches Julie's home from his rocky perch across the river, he describes his loss of hope in their relationship as the death of nature: "je parcours à grands pas tous les environs, et trouve partout dans les objets la même horreur qui règne au dedans de moi. On n'aperçoit plus de verdure, l'herbe est jaune et flétrie, les arbres sont dépouillés [...] et toute la nature est morte à mes yeux, comme l'espérance au fond de mon coeur" (1:137). Years later when Julie and Saint-Preux return to the same site, Saint-Preux's effort to be friends with his former lover is overthrown by the memories evoked by the place, filled with natural objects he equates with Julie; the rocks, the pebbles, the wind are all inextricably linked to his love for her (2:140). Given that Saint-Preux's love for Julie manifests itself as an inability to separate Julie and nature, Julie and Wolmar attempt to "cure" him by destabilizing his understanding of a pure feminized nature that exists in opposition to culture. As he is guided through Julie's Élysée garden, he is encouraged to recognize how Julie's cultural labor has played a part in the production of what he desperately wants to believe is a purely natural formation.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> See Elizabeth MacArthur, "Textual Gardens: Rousseau's Élysée and Girardin's Ermenonville," *Romance Quarterly* 38.3 (1991): 331-40, for an examination of Julie and Wolmar's use of language to control Saint-Preux's emotional response to the garden. MacArthur likens their use of language to the guiding function of poetic inscriptions found in real-life gardens such as Ermenonville. For a different reading of Élysée as a site that combines idyllic nature and cultural labor, see Jill H. Casid's chapter "Imperial Nurseries" in her *Sowing Empire*, previously cited. Casid discusses the role of literary gardens in the shaping of France's notion of imperialism. The Élysée garden, like Robinson Crusoe's island, represents the idyllic garden as "virgin territory and nursery for the (re)production of innocence cultivated and improved by labor" (xxiii).



As Saint-Preux enters the *Élysée* garden for the first time, the door to the outside world disappears behind him. His first reaction is a purely emotional response that connects Julie and her garden to the untouched nature he encountered on desert islands during his travels around the world: “Surpris, saisi, transporté d’un spectacle si peu prévu, je restai un moment immobile, et m’écriai dans un enthousiasme involontaire; ‘Ô Tinian! ô Juan-Fernandez! Julie, le bout du monde est à votre porte!’” (2: 88) Julie draws him immediately out of his reverie by depersonalizing his reaction, placing him on more solid ground by reminding him of the garden’s proximity to culture: “Beaucoup de gens le trouvent ici comme vous [...]; mais vingt pas de plus les ramènent bien vite à Clarens” (2: 88). At first Saint-Preux resists the idea that human art is involved in the formation of the edenic garden, but gradually with the help of Julie and Wolmar he begins to spot signs of the careful co-mingling of culture and nature. He spies some garden flowers mixed in with wildflowers, he sees how branches have been gently bent and directed to create something resembling a mangrove tree, and he opens his eyes to the strategic planting that creates the impression of nature left to its own devices, a “désert artificiel.”

Even after he begins to recognize the traces of human labor in the garden, he is still tempted to give in to a personal, emotional response. In his eyes the garden remains the perfect place to commune with thoughts of his lost love, the now-married Julie. Nature is nothing but a mirror for his own passion for Julie and for his grief over his own solitude. Julie again pulls him out of his daydreaming to encourage him to see nature in a different way, to see it for what it is, a complex, evolving organism that cannot be neatly separated from human culture: “tout ce que vous voyez n’est que la nature végétale et

inanimée, et quoi qu'on puisse faire elle laisse toujours une idée de la solitude qui attriste. Venez la voir animée et sensible. C'est là qu'à chaque instant du jour vous lui trouverez un attrait nouveau" (2:92). Julie's attempt to get Saint-Preux to see nature differently also comes through in a discussion of Élysée's bird population. The birds are not in cages, nor are they to be considered guests in human territory. According to Julie, she and Wolmar are the guests in the birds' natural habitat, and it is she and Wolmar who are obliged to the birds for tolerating human presence in their home. When Saint-Preux jokes about this humorous reversing of the human/animal hierarchy, Julie corrects him by pointing to a way out of this dualism. In response to Saint-Preux's implication that Julie and Wolmar have become slaves to the birds, she responds, "Voilà bien le propos d'un tyran, qui ne croit jouir de sa liberté qu'autant qu'il trouble celle des autres" (2: 95). The well-being of animals does not have to impinge upon that of humans, rather the two are interdependent. When the traces of Julie's labor in the garden are made visible to him, Saint-Preux learns to see the Élysée garden as a manifestation of the interdependence of nature and culture. In light of this new understanding, he must also revise the way he thinks about Julie. Instead of the reflection of his desire, or the symbol of an eternal natural femininity, she is a subject capable of producing her own meaning.

When considered in the context of the eighteenth-century debate over garden style, the Élysée garden is a fitting setting for a lesson on the relationship between nature and culture. The debate between those who favored the French formal style represented most famously by the Versailles gardens and those who preferred gardens in the English landscape style centered essentially on the kind of relationship should exist between

culture and nature. Rousseau himself was a proponent of the English style, and the description of the *Élysée* gardens in *Julie* provides him with the opportunity to extol the virtues of what he saw as a more natural style and to mock the artifice of the formal garden.<sup>111</sup> As Saint-Preux amuses Julie and Wolmar by imagining how a wealthy Parisian would be shocked at the rustic style of the *Élysée*, the editor offers his own commentary on trends in French garden style, seconding Saint-Preux's ridiculing of those who prefer culture to nature: "Je suis persuadé que le temps approche où l'on ne voudra plus dans les jardins rien de ce qui se trouve dans la campagne; on n'y souffrira plus ni plantes, ni arbrisseaux; on n'y voudra que des fleurs de porcelaine [...] et de beaux vases pleins de rien" (2: 98). If the French formal style is meant to communicate human power over nature with its geometrically trimmed hedges and symmetrical rows, the English style embodies something more like cooperation between humans and nature. The status of the gardener is like that of *Julie's* editor; we know that the artist has had some hand in creating the garden/novel, but it is difficult to tell where the work of the gardener ends and where nature begins, or where the editor's words end and the words of his characters begin; culture and nature become indistinguishable.

Saint-Preux's comprehension of the lesson is put to the test when he enters the *Élysée* garden unaccompanied. As he approaches the garden, he looks forward to feeling the presence of Julie: "Tout ce qui va m'environner est l'ouvrage de celle qui me fut si

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<sup>111</sup> For a discussion of the politics of the representation of the English garden as closer to nature than the French formal garden, see John Dixon Hunt and Peter Willis, *The Genius of Place* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998). See also Manfred Kusch, "The River and the Garden: Basic Spatial Models in *Candide* and *La Nouvelle Héloïse*," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 12.1 (Autumn 1978): 1-15.

chère. Je la contemplerai tout autour de moi [...] et je la trouverai partout comme elle est au fond de mon coeur” (2: 104). However, when he walks into the garden, he remembers that he must attempt to see Julie as she is, instead of as a romanticized image: “pour la première fois depuis mon retour j’ai vu Julie en son absence, non telle qu’elle fut pour moi et que j’aime encore à la représenter, mais telle qu’elle se montre à mes yeux tous les jours” (2:105). At least at this moment, it appears that he has been cured of his love for Julie, ready to accept his role in the compromised state of nature that is Clarens.

Besides learning to see Julie’s labor in the garden, Saint-Preux’s recognizes Julie’s work as a mother, which marks another important step in his cure. Upon observing the excellent behavior of Julie’s children, motivated by no apparent intervention from their mother, Saint-Preux assumes the children are naturally well-behaved. But when he suggests to Julie that she needs to intervene more in their education, she lays out the workings of her educational program. Once again Saint-Preux’s eyes are opened to the woman’s work that lies behind what he believed to be natural: “C’est là que m’expliquant à loisir ses maximes, elle m’a fait voir sous cet air de négligence la plus vigilante attention qu’ait jamais donné la tendresse maternelle” (2:187). The educational philosophy that Julie practices with her children corresponds to the “negative education” described in *Émile*. Like *Émile*’s tutor, Julie attempts to efface her intervention as much as possible, in order to give the children the illusion that they are learning on their own. In her description of how she intervenes in her children’s education, Julie deliberately blurs the boundary between nature and culture, in the same way as her work in the *Élysée* garden:

Ce sont les productions naturelles du fonds qu'il faut cultiver. Un propos vicieux dans leur bouche est une herbe étrangère dont le vent apporta la graine; si je la coupe par une réprimande, bientôt elle repoussera; au lieu de cela j'en cherche en secret la racine, et j'ai soin de l'arracher. Je ne suis, m'a-t-elle dit en riant, que la servante du Jardinier; je sarcle le jardin, j'en ôte la mauvaise herbe, c'est à lui de cultiver la bonne (2:212).

In this passage Julie appears as a kind of intermediary between her children/plants and her husband/gardener. While the significance of the labor of motherhood is underplayed in this scenario, Julie's words still manage to make this labor visible to Saint-Preux.

The recognition of the cultural labor involved in what appears to be natural is connected to the recognition of women and nature as independent subjects instead of objects constructed by the masculine gaze. By recognizing Julie's work in the Elysée, Saint-Preux's conception of the culture/nature dualism is destabilized, and he is forced to decouple the deeply entrenched woman-nature connection that led him to equate Julie with nature. As well shall see, in the absence of a pure, static nature and a fixed feminine identity, the ideal patriarchal society of Clarens cannot be sustained.

### **Nature and Culture at Clarens**

Clarens is a model society for Rousseau because it represents the same kind of "juste milieu" between culture and nature as the second state of nature Rousseau describes in the *Discours sur l'inégalité*. It is a place where people live as close to nature as possible without compromising their duties to society. The harmonious functioning of

the social economy at Clarens depends on maintaining gender and class differences held in place by the nature/culture dualism. It is essential that those whose identities are seen to be more ‘natural’ do not move outside of their prescribed roles. Julie must be virtuous mother and wife, and the rural peasants who work on the estate must be content with their duties. Many critics have noted the gender and class inequalities that undergird the pastoral paradise at Clarens.<sup>112</sup> By naturalizing these inequalities and thereby rendering them invisible, Rousseau is able to maintain the illusion of a successful synthesis between nature and culture. Any movement outside of natural roles, whether in the form of workers becoming educated, or Julie being unfaithful, would destroy this illusion.

The anxiety about the movement of the ‘natural’ class away from the country that is expressed in the second preface reappears at Clarens. Julie performs the same role that Rousseau ascribes to the novel in the preface; in her interactions with the villagers, she works to make them stay in their place: “Le grande maxime de Madame de Wolmar est donc de ne point favoriser les changements de condition, mais de contribuer à rendre heureux chacun dans la sienne, et surtout d’empêcher que la plus heureuse de toutes, qui est celle du villageois dans un État libre, ne se dépeuple en faveur des autres” (2:159). Wolmar uses the same logic to justify his conviction that the villagers should remain uneducated. While education might uncover hidden potential in rural peasants, just like mining might uncover valuable resources, it is best to leave these things buried: “Ceux qui sont destinés à vivre dans la simplicité champêtre n’ont pas besoin pour être heureux

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<sup>112</sup> See Starobinski’s chapter “La Nouvelle Héloïse” in *La Transparence et l’obstacle* 102-148, and Mira Morgenstern, “Women, Power and the Politics of Everyday Life” in *Feminist Interpretations of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* 113-143.

du développement de leurs facultés, et leurs talents enfouis sont comme les mines d'or du Valais que le bien public ne permet pas qu'on exploite" (2:193). Edouard describes the working class as being more bound to biological obligations than the cultured classes. He justifies his decision not to marry by reasoning that marriage and procreation are optional for people like himself, while they are obligatory for the working class (2:290). While everyone plays their roles for a time, the whole system begins to collapse when Julie moves outside of her designated role.

Shortly before her death, Julie expresses her mysterious dissatisfaction with the static state happiness at Clarens: "Je ne vois partout que sujets de contentement, et je ne suis pas contente. Une langueur secrète s'insinue au fond de mon coeur; [...]  
l'attachement que j'ai pour tout ce qui m'est cher ne suffit pas pour l'occuper, il lui reste une force inutile dont il ne sait que faire [...] Mon ami; je suis trop heureuse; le bonheur m'ennuie" (2:334). This comment foreshadows Julie's death; in a note the editor declares it to be her "chant du cygne" (2:334). Julie's boredom is a sign that her identity cannot be contained within the natural role prescribed for her. The revelation that Julie later makes to Saint-Preux in a letter written from her deathbed serves as further confirmation that her identity cannot be reduced to her status as mother and wife. She still loves Saint-Preux, and she refuses the notion that this love is incompatible with virtue: "Mon ami, je fais cet aveu sans honte; ce sentiment resté malgré moi fut involontaire, il n'a rien coûté à mon innocence" (2:385). In an attempt to correct for the destabilizing effect of Julie's death on the community at Clarens, Wolmar makes Claire's daughter Henriette into a replacement. Henriette plays the role of Julie very well, but her performance only aggravates the

instability of the grieving Claire. Seeing that Claire is pushed dangerously close to insanity by the image of this imitation Julie, Wolmar decides that his strategy has failed.

Throughout *Julie*, the text undermines the nature/culture dualism by constructing an image of an animated, dynamic nature. While the two prefaces posit an opposition between the cultured reader and the novel's natural characters, they also expose cultural labor as a necessary part of the creation of natural subjects. Clarens emerges not as a pastoral idyll, but as a post-pastoral landscape subject to the movement of history, in which neither masculine nor feminine subjectivity can be grounded in a static nature.

### **Educating Natural Subjects: *Émile ou de l'Éducation***

Like *Julie*, Rousseau's *Émile ou de l'éducation* is a text that posits nature -- specifically a nature that is understood to be in opposition to culture -- as the preferred site of identity production for both men and women. However, the nature/culture opposition proves to be unstable ground for the construction of Rousseau's ideal natural man *Émile* and his female counterpart Sophie. Despite Rousseau's best efforts to keep it invisible, the cultural labor necessary for the formation of natural subjects is glaringly present throughout *Émile* and the unfinished sequel *Émile et Sophie ou Les Solitaires*. The visibility of this labor in the formation of the feminine subject -- Sophie's journey -- is particularly significant. *Émile* is based on the same premise as *Julie* is: that a literary representation of natural subjects living an ideal natural life can transform readers' relationships with each other and with nature. Women readers are accorded a critical role in the social transformation that *Émile* proposes.



Rousseau begins *Émile* by addressing mothers, calling upon them to recognize the important role they must play in the education of their children. This role is prescribed for women based on their nature: “cette première éducation appartient incontestablement aux femmes; si l’auteur de la nature eut voulu qu’elle appartient aux hommes, il leur eut donné du lait pour nourrir les enfants” (245). Because of their proximity to nature, women are charged with protecting children from the influences of culture: “Forme de bonne heure une enceinte autour de l’âme de ton enfant” (246). But in suggesting that women can better perform these duties by reading education treatises like *Émile*, Rousseau acknowledges that motherhood involves cultural labor. The mother that Rousseau addresses at the beginning of *Émile* is a gardener like Julie, whose work is to cultivate the natural in her children: “C’est à toi que je m’adresse, tendre et prévoyante mère, qui sus t’écarter de la grande route, et garantir l’arbrisseau naissant du choc des opinions humaines! Cultive, arrose la jeune plante avant qu’elle meure” (246). Culture intervenes in the formation of the natural subjects *Émile* and Sophie. These two characters are destined for a life modeled on the “temps des patriarches” of the *Discours*, but their journeys do not end there.

### **Émile’s Journey**

In *Émile* as in *Julie*, nature and culture are figured in terms of geographical locations, the country and the city. One of the first decisions that *Émile*’s tutor makes regarding his education is to bring his pupil to the countryside to live. This first journey emphasizes a distinction that Rousseau returns to a number of times; *Émile* lives in the

country, but he is different from a typical rural inhabitant. Émile is “bien né” and comes from a wealthy (presumably urban) family. His tutor selected him precisely because his social class puts him at a distance from nature. Poverty being a condition Rousseau associates with a life closer to nature, a poor child would be more likely to become a natural subject on his own, without needing to travel any physical or moral distance: “Choisissons donc un riche: nous serons sûrs au moins d’avoir fait un homme de plus, au lieu qu’un pauvre peut devenir homme de lui-même” (267).<sup>113</sup> Thus Rousseau’s ideal natural subject is not exclusively natural; he is both “un sauvage fait pour habiter les villes” and a man born into culture made to live in the country.

A central factor in the tutor’s decision to bring his pupil Émile to the country is the kind of woman he expects to find there. Women in the country are better equipped than urban women to help Émile access a natural life. Fundamental to the opposition that Rousseau sets up between the country and the city is the behavior of women in the two locations. Rousseau locates the ideal mother for Émile outside of culture, both geographically and morally. The unnatural influence of culture has distracted urban women from their most important duty, their “premier devoir,” which is to have and raise children. The childless, cultivated women of the city threaten to transform the whole continent into a barren landscape: “Non contentes d’avoir cessé d’allaiter leurs enfants, les femmes cessent d’en vouloir faire [...] Cet usage ajouté aux autres causes de dépopulation nous annonce le sort prochain de l’Europe. Les sciences, les arts, la

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<sup>113</sup> A similar distinction between the peasant child and the wealthy child is established in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. Since the peasant already lives in nature, he does not need an education to teach him how to be a natural subject.

philosophie et les moeurs qu'elle engendre, ne tarderont pas d'en faire un désert" (256).

In contrast, women living in the country embrace their maternal duties, primarily because they are in an environment that is closer to the state of nature than the city: "dans un séjour plus naturel à l'espèce, les plaisirs attachés aux devoirs de la nature leur ôteraient bientôt le goût de ceux qui ne s'y rapportent pas" (277). Against those who claim that urban women prove that childbearing is not an essential part of women's nature, Rousseau objects that this exception does not disprove the rule. Urban women are able to maintain their lifestyle, he argues, only because rural women compensate for their lack of contribution to the repopulation effort: "Et que deviendraient vos villes, si les campagnes éloignées, où les femmes vivent plus simplement et plus chastement ne réparaient la stérilité des Dames?" (698). Urban and rural women are opposed even in their diets, and for Rousseau this distinction creates important differences in their ability to provide for their children. Rural women eat more vegetables and less meat than their urban counterparts, which supposedly results in more nourishing breast milk. Taking all of these factors into account, it is clear to Émile's tutor that he will find the perfect mother for his pupil in the country. It is through his new mother that Émile will be offered access a more natural life: "Il prendra l'état de sa nouvelle mère, il habitera sa maison rustique, et son gouverneur l'y suivra" (276). Just as the country is the only logical place to find Émile's ideal mother, it proves to be the location of his ideal partner Sophie.

In the case of Émile's mother, a geographic location in nature establishes her identity as an ideal caregiver. In the case of Sophie, the ideal feminine subject is also tied to a natural setting. Thus feminine identity emerges in this text, as it does in *Julie*, as

being more rooted in physical nature than is masculine identity. The question of Sophie's identity is directly linked to *where* she is: "En quels lieux est son asile? Où la trouverons-nous? Pour la trouver, il faut la connaître. Sachons premièrement ce qu'elle est, nous jugerons mieux des lieux qu'elle habite" (692). As an ideal masculine subject, Émile has the ability to retain a strong sense of self regardless of his location. His identity is not tied to any particular physical location or limited to any one vocation: "il sera premièrement homme; tout ce qu'un homme doit être, il saura l'être au besoin tout aussi bien que qui que ce soit, et la fortune aura beau le faire changer de place, il sera toujours à la sienne" (252). Before Émile can meet his perfect partner, he must learn to identify and appreciate the qualities of a natural woman such as Sophie through exposure to 'unnatural' women. To this end, his tutor takes him to Paris in search of a wife. Émile learns not only that his future wife does not live in Paris, but that by definition the city is no place for a woman who would suit him: "Émile tourne un oeil de dédain vers cette grande ville et dit avec dépit: que de jours perdus en vaines recherches! Ah! ce n'est pas là qu'est l'épouse de mon coeur" (770).

Émile and his tutor cover the distance on foot between Paris and the rural village where Émile finally encounters Sophie, and with each step they measure the difference between culture and nature. In this passage, mobility and activity emerge as characteristics that separate the masculine from the feminine, just as they separate the city from the country.<sup>114</sup> The mode of transport that takes them away from the city is

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<sup>114</sup> For a psychoanalytic reading of the theme of mobility and masculinity in Rousseau, see Sarah Kofman, "Rousseau's Phallogocratic Ends," *Feminist Interpretations of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* 229-244. Kofman reads Rousseau's insistence on masculine activity as

described in terms that solidify their identity as active, masculine, natural subjects defined against idle, effeminate cultural subjects who would travel by coach: “Nous ne le faisons point [le voyage] tristement assis et comme emprisonnés dans une petite cage bien fermée. Nous ne voyageons point dans la mollesse et dans le repos des femmes” (771). Additionally, traveling on foot allows them to study their natural surroundings. Rousseau presents this direct contact with nature as a more authentic method of study than the one practiced by the “philosophes de ruelles,” who attempt to understand nature while confined to their *cabinets*. After this voyage to the city and back has shown Émile the differences between nature and culture, he is prepared to identify his ideal counterpart. While Émile’s journey to natural subjectivity takes up the majority of Rousseau’s text, traces of Sophie’s journey are present as well, and they play an important role in establishing the post-pastoral character of Rousseau’s nature.

### **Sophie’s Journey**

While we follow Émile’s long journey to natural subjectivity, when we finally meet Sophie in book five of *Émile* she appears already to be an ideal natural subject. As a woman, Sophie is already in nature, so she needs only the gentle guidance of her parents to maintain her natural subjectivity. Sophie’s education has cultivated her natural capacities, but has stopped short of serious study that would have pushed her into the realm of culture: “son éducation n’est ni brillante ni négligée; elle a du goût sans étude, des talents sans art, du jugement sans connaissances. Son esprit ne sait pas, mais il est

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a manifestation of his fear of “being suffocated, paralyzed, and imprisoned in the maternal womb” (239).

cultivé pour apprendre, c'est une terre bien préparée qui n'attend que le grain pour rapporter" (769). Sarah Kofman writes that Sophie's education is designed to produce "the sort of woman who can now only be found in some mythical nature preserve, untouched by civilization" (232). However, Sophie's journey to nature is not totally suppressed. As we shall see, she does not remain untouched by culture, and she travels outside the confines of the nature preserve.

Like *Émile*, Sophie's social class of origin sets her apart from her rural neighbors. She might have lived the life of an upper-class woman, but following the loss of her parents' fortune, she moved into the more natural state of rural poverty. As people who have experienced both wealth and poverty, Sophie's parents are in the ideal position to teach their daughter about the artificiality of culture. When Sophie's father advises her about what kind of man she should choose as her husband, he stresses that wealth should not be an important factor: "Croyez-moi, Sophie, ne cherchez point des biens dont nous bénissons le Ciel de nous avoir délivrés; nous n'avons goûté le bonheur qu'après avoir perdu la richesse" (757). Even though Sophie's parents have lost most of their wealth, they maintain the ability to recognize people with similar social backgrounds. It is because Sophie's father immediately recognizes *Émile* as a well-born person that he first gains entry into the family home: "Il a gardé de son ancienne opulence la facilité de connaître l'état des gens dans leurs manières [...] sur ce passeport nous sommes admis" (774). During their first encounter, one difference between *Émile* and Sophie's educations emerges. In terms of their respective experiences with literature, Sophie

appears to be more well-traveled than Émile. Sophie has read a book that Émile has not, and this allows her to assert her power from the very first moments of their relationship.

In book three of *Émile*, Rousseau declares books to be a dangerous but necessary tool in education. Reading is threatening because of its potential to transport the reader away from their natural self: “Je hais les livres; ils n’apprennent qu’à parler de ce qu’on ne sait pas” (454). Despite his professed hatred for books, Rousseau admits that “il nous faut absolument des livres” (454). Books play a critical role in the natural education of both Émile and Sophie. The primary text that intervenes in Sophie’s education is François Salignac de la Mothe Fénelon’s *Les Aventures de Télémaque, fils d’Ulysse* (1699). Like *Émile*, *Télémaque* is a pedagogical novel, written as a guide for the young Duc de Bourgogne, the heir apparent to the French throne. In the novel, the protagonist Telemachus embarks on a quest to find his father Ulysses. His companion on this journey is his mentor, the goddess Athena disguised as a man. Throughout his journey he has many educational encounters with different kinds of societies. The healthiest and most well-functioning societies he encounters are those that embrace a pastoral lifestyle. In the figure of Idomeneus, Telemachus learns that a good sovereign can lead his people to a happier life by encouraging them to live off of the land. As a text designed for a young man preparing to wield political power (while remaining close to nature), *Télémaque* would seem to be more appropriate reading material for Émile. Based on the novel that each of them reads, Sophie seems more aligned with the social/cultural and Émile, who reads Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, with the natural.

Sophie's reading of *Télémaque* allows her to assert moral and intellectual autonomy in her relationship with Émile. Disrupting the notion of the feminine subject as the passive reflection of masculine agency, it is Sophie who exhibits the most agency in the choice of her perfect partner.<sup>115</sup> Before Émile even notices Sophie's presence at the dinner table on the occasion of their first meeting, Sophie has identified Émile as the real-life incarnation of her fictional love Telemachus. In the description of this event, Émile's innocent ignorance of this book is contrasted with Sophie's cultural awareness: "La naïve vivacité du jeune homme enchante tout le monde, mais la fille plus sensible que personne à cette marque de son bon coeur croit voir Télémaque [...] Elle porte à la dérobée les yeux sur lui pour mieux examiner sa figure; elle n'y trouve rien qui démente la comparaison" (775). Before he meets Sophie, Émile's tutor has described her, even given her a name, but Émile still needs guidance before he can identify her as his ideal partner. As he attempts to match Sophie with the portrait of the ideal woman in his head, he looks to the tutor for final confirmation: "Il me regarde inquiet et troublé [...] Il semble me dire à chaque regard: guidez-moi tandis qu'il est temps; si mon coeur se livre et se trompe, je n'en reviendrai de mes jours" (776).

Sophie reads and interprets *Télémaque* on her own. When the attachment that Sophie forms to the fictional Telemachus threatens to render her search for a real-life partner impossible, Sophie seems to prove Rousseau's point about the danger that reading holds for women. This is the danger that Rousseau imagines in a tragic hypothetical scenario in which Sophie's reading causes the undoing of her entire family and her own

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<sup>115</sup> See Denise Schaeffer, "Reconsidering the Role of Sophie in Rousseau's *Emile*," *Polity* 30.4 (Summer 1998): 607-626.



death: “Peindrai-je enfin l’infortunée, encore plus attachée à sa chimère par la persécution qu’elle lui fait souffrir, marchant à pas lents vers la mort et descendant dans la tombe au moment qu’on croit l’entraîner à l’autel?” (763). But because Sophie is a woman of reason, this is not how her story ends. Sophie’s love for a fictional man does not negate her reason, and her reason serves to reinforce her identity as a natural woman. When her parents attempt to cure her of her “manie” by reasoning with her, they discover that reason is on her side: “Combien de fois elle les réduisit au silence en se servant contre eux de leurs propres raisonnements [...] ils ne l’avaient point formée pour un homme de son siècle” (762). Given the corrupt nature of society, Sophie’s inability to find a suitable partner among her contemporaries can be read as the sign of a successful natural education. Destabilizing the gendered nature/culture dualism, Sophie’s reading of *Télémaque* aligns the feminine with the cultural, and reason with the natural.

Unlike Sophie’s direct relationship with *Télémaque*, Émile has a highly mediated encounter with his primary text *Robinson Crusoe*. Émile’s tutor introduces the work into his curriculum at a transitional moment in the course of his education, when “l’activité de l’esprit” is incorporated into what was a predominantly physical education. This is the moment when the tutor will carefully begin to “unveil” the secrets of nature, an action that will necessitate an increased effort on his part to protect Émile from the potentially denaturalizing effects of scientific knowledge: “Que d’abîmes je vois creuser par nos vaines sciences autour de ce jeune infortuné! Ô toi qui va le conduire dans ces périlleux sentiers, et tirer devant ses yeux le rideau sacré de la nature, tremble” (428). At this point Émile leaves the total innocence of the first stage of childhood to enter “l’âge paisible de

l'intelligence," the tranquil period that precedes the onset of desire. *Robinson Crusoe* is a part of the carefully controlled introduction of culture into natural education. The tutor chooses this novel because it models the kind of natural education that Émile is undergoing. After he is stranded on a deserted island, Crusoe must discover on his own how to live in nature, "dépourvu de l'assistance de ses semblables et des instruments de tous les arts" (455). Émile's encounter with the text will go beyond passive reading, into active identification with the protagonist, to the point where he no longer distinguishes between himself and Robinson Crusoe, or between his own life and the life on Crusoe's island. Just as Émile's encounter with the natural world is largely mediated by his tutor, his encounter with the fictional natural man takes place under controlled conditions. Émile will have access only to the portion of the novel that his tutor feels will best model natural subjectivity. The novel as he encounters it has been "débarrassé de tout son fatras," that is to say, everything preceding or following Crusoe's time on the island. Through his editing, Émile's tutor attempts to erase the traces of Crusoe's cultural self, and the cultural tools that contribute to his survival on the island. Many items rescued from his ship, including a gun, bedding, tools, and clothing facilitate Crusoe's existence in nature. Another aspect of the novel that Rousseau would attempt to overlook in the interest of presenting Crusoe as wholly self-sufficient is the presence of the servant Friday. According to the tutor, Émile has no problem glossing over the contradiction posed by the presence of Friday, a character "qui maintenant ne le touche guère" (456). Friday's identity is subsumed into nature in order to erase any trace of Crusoe's dependence on his labor. For Diane Berrett Brown, Friday's invisibility maintains the

myth of Crusoe's independence in the same way as the tutor's invisibility gives Émile the impression that he is independent.<sup>116</sup> Many critics, along with Rousseau himself, have noted the amount of artifice involved in Émile's 'natural' education. The tutor's control over what Émile believes to be an unmediated encounter with his environment leads to what Brown calls "synthetic liberty." As at Clarens, Émile and Sophie's natural life is made possible only by a great deal of cultural intervention.

By the end of *Émile*, we find the natural man and his ideal partner poised on the brink of a new golden age. Following the recommendation of Émile's tutor, they will live a simple rural life, and through their example others will find the way to happiness:

Je ne t'exhorte pas pour cela d'aller vivre dans les grandes villes; au contraire un des exemples que les bons doivent donner aux autres est celui de la vie patriarcale et champêtre, la première vie de l'homme, la plus paisible, la plus naturelle, et la plus douce à qui le coeur n'est pas corrompu. (859)

Émile and Sophie are expecting their first child, and the tutor will remain to participate in the happy family's life. However, the ideal world of the patriarchal family proves as unsustainable as the community at Clarens. If Émile and Sophie's story ended with *Émile*, it would be possible to believe that they were able to sustain the synthesis of nature and culture by remaining fixed in their natural identities. This is not, however, where Rousseau stops their journey.

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<sup>116</sup> See Diane Berrett Brown's essay, "The Constraints of Liberty at the Scene of Instruction" in *Rousseau and Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 159-173.

*Émile et Sophie ou les Solitaires*

Shortly after the publication of *Émile*, Rousseau began work on a sequel that he never finished, entitled *Émile et Sophie ou Les Solitaires*.<sup>117</sup> *Les Solitaires* is made up of two letters from Émile to his tutor. The first letter recounts his family's misfortune after the tutor's departure. Because death comes even to Arcadia, the perfection of Sophie and Émile's idyllic rural world is shattered by the loss of their daughter, along with Sophie's mother and father. According to Émile, it is Sophie's inability to cope with this hardship that starts the couple on their path to destruction. Wishing to remove Sophie from a landscape now imprinted with loss, he decides to relocate his family to Paris: "elle faisait retentir de leurs noms et de ses regrets tous les lieux où jadis elle avait reçu leurs innocentes caresses: tous les objets qui les lui rappelaient aigrissaient ses douleurs; je résolu de l'éloigner de ces tristes lieux" (50). However, even before their arrival in Paris, Émile begins to fear that their marriage and Sophie's virtue are too weak to withstand the corrupting force of culture: "Je m'effrayais d'exposer une union si pure à tant de dangers qui pouvaient l'altérer. Je frémissais en regardant la triste Sophie de songer que j'entraînais moi-même tant de vertus et de charmes dans ce gouffre de préjugés et de

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<sup>117</sup> In his introduction to the Pléiade edition of *Les Solitaires*, Pierre Burgelin describes a possible ending to the work that Rousseau shared with Bernardin de Saint-Pierre. Emile travels to a desert island after being released from captivity in Algiers. Emile remarries, and the couple live happily on the island until Sophie appears. Emile takes Sophie as his second wife, but, unable to forget her infidelity, Sophie dies of guilt. After her death, Emile discovers a letter that explains the circumstances that led Sophie to betray him, and concludes that she was not to blame. This ending, as Michel Feher notes, allows us to conclude that both Sophie and Emile remained true to their natural identities, uncorrupted by culture. See Pierre Burgelin, "Emile et Sophie" in *Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Oeuvres complètes, IV* (Paris: Gallimard Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1969) CLXII-CLXVII. See also Michel Feher's introduction to *Les Solitaires* (Paris: Editions Payot et Rivages, 1994) 12.

vices où vont se perdre de toutes parts l'innocence et le bonheur" (51). His fears prove to be well founded. Émile's love for Sophie fades amidst the distractions of the city. The two begin moving in separate social circles, and the physical and emotional distance between them leaves room for indiscretions: "Chacun des deux pensait se mettre à son aise loin de la personne qui avait droit d'inspection sur lui" (55). Eventually they must face the most devastating consequence of their lifestyle when Sophie becomes pregnant by another man. As a woman whose identity is even closer to nature than Émile's, Sophie's fall represents an even greater deviation than his own, a "changement cent fois plus inconcevable" (53). In comparison to Émile's own infidelity, or to the predictable infidelity of corrupt urban women, Sophie's is far more disturbing: "Sophie adultère est le plus odieux des monstres: La distance de ce qu'elle est à ce qu'elle fut est immense" (72). While Sophie eventually dies in disgrace, Émile is "reborn," and, falling back on the skills and strength he developed in his youth, he moves on with his life. The second unfinished letter of *Les Solitaires* recounts his adventures.

Studies of *Les Solitaires* tend to read it as proof of the success or failure of Émile and Sophie's respective educations. Pierre Burgelin sees Sophie's adultery as a failure of her education while Émile's perseverance demonstrates his tutor's success: "Sa vertu sera finalement si mal accrochée que Rousseau osera, ayant dépeint la femme parfaite, la laisser succomber aux tentations de la grande ville[...] Dans l'inachèvement où l'auteur l'a laissé, le roman montre donc l'échec de l'éducation de Sophie en face de la réussite de celle d'Émile" (128). Feminist critics have argued that Sophie's infidelity does not represent a deviation from her education, but rather is the logical consequence of an

education that trained her to be completely dependent on her partner.<sup>118</sup> According to this reading, Sophie's failure is the direct result of Émile's failure to provide a good example. Since he lets the distractions of the city undermine his connection to his family, it is not reasonable to expect Sophie to behave any differently. Émile himself considers his own implication in Sophie's downfall: "Ah! son inconstance est l'ouvrage de la tienne. Elle avait juré de t'être fidèle; et toi n'avais-tu pas juré de l'adorer toujours? Tu l'abandonnes, et tu veux qu'elle reste [...] Elle n'a violé ses serments qu'à ton exemple" (72). After considering the possibility of forgiving Sophie and returning to their marriage, however, Émile concludes that reconciliation is impossible. Even if he forgave her, Émile reasons, Sophie could never love a man whom she had betrayed.

The fates of Émile and Sophie in what Brown calls the "post-pedagogical world" of *Les Solitaires* shed light on the important role of cultural intervention in their upbringing. Without the tutor present to control their environment, argues Brown, their happiness cannot be sustained.<sup>119</sup> A different reading is possible if we take into account the non-oppositional relationship between nature and culture that emerges in the text. The presence of a cultural mechanism does not falsify the natural, but rather the nature/culture divide itself is revealed to be artificial. *Émile* confirms the impossibility of a static masculine or feminine subjectivity. The transformation of Sophie and Émile in Paris reveals that not even the ideal education can fix their natures in a particular place.

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<sup>118</sup> See Nancy Senior, "Les Solitaires as a Test for Emile and Sophie," *The French Review* 49.4 (March 1976): 528-535, Mary Trouille, *Sexual Politics* 37, and Lori J. Marso, "Rousseau's Subversive Women" in *Feminist Interpretations of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* 245-276.

<sup>119</sup> See Berrett Brown 169.

## Conclusion

Reflecting on Rousseau's post-pastoral, it becomes clear that Rousseau has the same definition of literature as many contemporary writers and scholars exploring the connection between the humanities and the environment. In many ways his work fulfills Terry Gifford's vision of what post-pastoral literature might do, as "writing that can point towards a right way to live at home on our planet earth" ("Post-Pastoral" 17). Gifford and other ecocritics are invested in the belief that "our art may be a mode of feeling our way back into a balanced relationship with external nature" (*Pastoral* 161). Perhaps ecocriticism has the most to learn from all of the evidence in Rousseau's texts that it is unhelpful to think about how literature could help us find our way "back" to some mythical golden age of balance. The idea of balance itself may not be a useful goal to strive for, as ecological science points to a constantly shifting, unstable universe. In the *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité*, Rousseau declares the state of nature to be a product of his imagination, and he makes it clear that he is not suggesting that his contemporaries should try to return to the lifestyle of the first humans. Instead of restoring a former way of life, Rousseau uses literature to get to an altogether new place, where nature and culture are indistinguishable. In turn, this new understanding of nature takes pastoral literature where many critics thought it could never go; working at the boundary between literary and lived nature, it does not function as escape from reality, rather it informs reality.

What are we to make of how the models of natural living Rousseau proposes in *Julie* and *Émile* end with the death of the female protagonist and the disintegration of their harmonious micro-societies? The unsustainability of these models is further proof that mapping an imaginary golden age onto complex, dynamic human communities and environments is bound to fail. In the case of Rousseau's golden age, its failure can be attributed above all to its patriarchal structure. The community at Clarens and the marriage of Émile and Sophie is not designed to withstand any kind of movement. As soon as the situation evolves, when Julie and Sophie transgress the limits prescribed by Rousseau's notion of female nature, the whole system falls apart. Against the notion of a static, 'pure' nature where women are immobilized and dependent, the natural world of Clarens and the countryside of *Émile* are sites of change, landscapes altered by labor, breakdowns, breakups, and death. These two texts show us that post-pastoral models for living must be able to accommodate constantly shifting identities, as well as disappearing boundaries between masculine and feminine, and between the urban and the rural.

Although feminist and ecocritical readings of Rousseau offer important insights into Rousseau's work on women and nature, the concept of the post-pastoral reveals that there is a great deal to be gained from a dialogue between these two discourses. Attending to how pastoral texts like those of Montpensier, Fontenelle and Rousseau treat the interconnectedness of gender and nature, we can see how the twenty-first century project of creating a postmodern pastoral can benefit from earlier pastoral traditions. Out of all of the authors in this study, Rousseau's story of human-nature relations corresponds most closely to mainstream environmentalist narratives; human alienation from the



natural world leads to social and environmental decline. A closer reading, however, reveals that Rousseau's work exposes the artificiality of this narrative, as well as its failure to accommodate the complex relationships between gender, social class and nature.

## Conclusion

### Et in Arcadia Ego

In a classic essay that continues to inform virtually every critical discussion of the pastoral, Erwin Panofsky considers two readings of pastoral, one “hard” and one “soft,” stemming from two different interpretations of a Latin phrase that became a fixture of pastoral painting during and after the Renaissance.<sup>120</sup> In these paintings, the phrase “Et in Arcadia Ego” is inscribed on a tomb in the middle of an idyllic pastoral landscape, surrounded by shepherds who appear to be reflecting upon its meaning. The “hard” truth about the pastoral is located in what Panofsky identifies as the original, correct interpretation of the Latin: “I, too, lived in Arcadia,” in which the speaker is understood to be death. Panofsky connects this hard truth to the real life landscape of the region of Greece known as Arcadia. While the Arcadia described in Virgil’s *Eclogues* is a lush, fertile pastoral paradise, the reality of life in Arcadia in this period was quite different. Citing descriptions of the region in the histories of Polybius, Juvenal, and Philostratus, Panofsky concludes that Arcadia was “a poor, bare, rocky, chilly country, devoid of all the amenities of life and scarcely affording food for a few meager goats” (298). Death and hardship were a part of daily life in this place. With this hard truth, Panofsky contrasts the “soft” image of Arcadia on which our modern understandings of pastoral are

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<sup>120</sup> See Erwin Panofsky, “Et in Arcadia Ego: Poussin and the Elegiac Tradition,” in his *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1955). Panofsky published an earlier version of this essay in 1934. Louis Marin analyzes the differences between these two versions, tracing the evolution in Panofsky’s practice of art history and his thinking on the theme of Arcadia in “Panofsky et Poussin en Arcadie,” in *Sublime Poussin* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1995) 106-125.

founded. If the term pastoral now conjures up images of an eternal, untroubled bucolic paradise, if we have now completely forgotten about the original ‘reality’ of Arcadia, argues Panofsky, it is in large part due to the seventeenth-century’s interpretation of the “Et in Arcadia Ego” theme, as represented in the paintings of Poussin.

Panofsky reads Virgil as accomplishing an ideal synthesis between the hard and soft pastoral in his *Eclogues*. While he idealized Arcadia’s landscape, his shepherds remained conscious of death and heartbreak. However, in a move “consistent with the more relaxed and less fearful spirit of a period that had triumphantly emerged from the Counter-Reformation,” Poussin’s representation of shepherds encountering a tomb softens the encounter with death. Panofsky traces the progressive softening of this encounter from Poussin’s first to his second “Et in Arcadia Ego” painting. In the second painting, the skull that previously sat on the tomb has disappeared, and the shepherds appear to be not shocked or surprised, but rather contemplative. Citing seventeenth- and eighteenth-century commentaries on the painting by Félibien, Abbé du Bos, and Diderot, Panofsky demonstrates that the Latin inscription on the tomb is no longer taken as the words of death itself, but rather as the voice of a departed shepherd. Instead of a confronting warning from death that seems to shatter the illusion of pastoral paradise altogether, the inscription comes to represent a more gentle reminder that the shepherds should not take their idyllic life for granted.

Panofsky does not explicitly assign relative value to hard and soft pastoral in this essay. However, it is clear that he sees the victory of the soft pastoral and the decline and disappearance of the hard -- this seventeenth-century shift “which was of paramount

importance for modern literature,” -- as a degradation of the pastoral mode. Panofsky’s story of the pastoral begins with ideal balance of idyllic and real found in the earliest pastoral works of writers like Virgil, but it ends with an image of nineteenth-century pastoral as a terminally ill tradition, buckling under the weight of its own artificiality. He cites Flaubert’s incomprehension of the phrase “Et in Arcadia Ego” as evidence that pastoral had lost its capacity to speak to readers:

And in Poussin’s own homeland, France, the humanistic tradition had so much decayed in the nineteenth century that Gustave Flaubert, the great contemporary of the early Impressionists, no longer understood the famous phrase at all. In his beautiful description of the Bois de la Garenne -- “parc très beau malgré ces beautés factices” -- he mentions, together with the Temple of Vesta, a Temple of Friendship, and a great number of artificial ruins: “sur une pierre taillée en forme de tombe, *In Arcadia ego*, non-sens dont je n’ai pu découvrir l’intention.” (318)

Flaubert’s incomprehension of the tomb’s inscription is set against a background that is a physical manifestation of Panofsky’s soft pastoral. Flaubert can only appreciate the beauty of the garden in spite of its artificiality. His understanding of Arcadia goes no deeper than the surface of the artificial ruins in a garden trying hard but failing to appear natural.

Without accepting Panofsky’s reading as the definitive interpretation, I am interested in the story he tells about the pastoral. One aspect of Panofsky’s story in particular resonates with the story of pastoral that I have told in this dissertation. That is, a core function of the pastoral is to bring realities of lived nature together with nature as it

exists in the literary imaginary. This critical aspect of this literary mode gets lost in so many versions of its story. Diagnosing the state of pastoral literature in France in 1760, d’Alembert seems to support Panofsky’s representation of this period as the beginning of the end for pastoral: “ce genre est devenu bien froid sur le papier. Théocrite, Virgile, et Fontenelle ont épuisé tout ce qu’on peut dire sur les bois, les fontaines et les troupeaux” (293).<sup>121</sup> So the story goes, that pastoral proceeds ever further away from its ‘natural’ source, and by the eighteenth-century it has run out of steam. After this point it continues only as a dangerous evasion of historical reality, culminating in Marie-Antoinette’s dairy farm at Versailles, an artificial escape that shattered upon contact with the French Revolution.

As we have seen, many twentieth- and twenty-first-century critics have tried to tell a different story of the pastoral. The pastoral is not dead; instead it has been reinfused with a healthy dose of nature. From the artificial “soft” pastoral we can sift out something more real and redeeming, more georgic than pastoral (Wyngaard, Low), complex instead of sentimental (Marx), nature writing instead of political allegory (Hiltner). While my understanding of pastoral is obviously indebted to all of these approaches, I have tried to find a way to get around these distinctions. What is at stake in breaking down these distinctions is not only our understanding of the pastoral mode, but our understanding of what literature can do. In my readings of Montpensier, Fontenelle, and Rousseau, we have seen that literature can shape notions of gender, nature, and culture that have an impact upon our everyday lives.

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<sup>121</sup> See Jean le Rond d’Alembert, *Réflexions sur la poésie*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, Vol. 4. (Paris: 1922) 293.

In my discussion of Montpensier, I showed how she brings her experience of rural exile into contact with pastoral literature. At this point of contact, we can see that her pastoral fiction, though idealized, is not a less effective vehicle for expressing feminine power than the non-fictional account in her memoirs. Her texts work away at the difference between literary and lived nature, allowing Montpensier to envision “undomesticated” alternatives to the place designated for women in patriarchal society.

Through a reading of Fontenelle’s pastoral, I addressed the perceived incompatibility between scientific and humanistic ways of knowing nature. In response to critics, scholars of the environmental humanities have embraced the hard sciences as the standard by which all accounts of the natural world should be judged. As a result, increased value is placed on ‘realistic’ literary representations in pastoral literature. I argue that Fontenelle succeeds where ecocriticism has failed thus far, in creating a mutually informative dialogue between literature and science. His pastoral theory, poetry, and prose all foreground the relationship between lived and literary nature.

In the final chapter, I considered Rousseau’s post-pastoral and his desire to break down the barrier between pastoral fiction and reality. Although his literary models of natural life fail, his notion that nature is a destination arrived at through culture is useful to my understanding of what role pastoral literature might play in an era of concern about environmental crisis. From Rousseau, as from Montpensier and Fontenelle, we learn that our ideas about what society could be can shape the way it is. The function of pastoral literature is not only to mourn a lost ‘balance’ between humans and nature, which may or

may not have corresponded to reality at some point in history, but rather to help us move forward by redefining our understanding of the human and the natural.

Working within the disjunction that appears where lived and literary landscapes converge, these pastoral texts disrupt conventional understandings of the relationship between the twenty-first-century and early modern literature and culture. By foregrounding the disjunction between idyllic pastoral and social reality, these texts disrupt narratives in which the early modern is 'pastoralized,' reduced to the object of post-modern nostalgia for a mythical prescientific, preindustrial 'balanced' relationship between humans and nature. These texts reveal a premodern post-pastoral, disrupting the notion that the early modern is nature to our culture, an untouchable, unreadable Arcadia that no longer speaks to us. Through the lens of the post-pastoral, we can recognize the early modern's capacity to be an important participant in contemporary conversations.

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