STAGING THE IMPROPER BODY: SUZANNE CURCHOD NECKER (1737-1794) AND THE STIGMATIZATION OF THE SELF

by

Sonja Boon
Master of Arts (Liberal Studies), Simon Fraser University, 2004
PGRNCM, Royal Northern College of Music, 1994
Master of Music, Indiana University, 1993
Bachelor of Music in Performance, University of Toronto, 1991

THESIS
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

In the
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Spring 2008

Approval

Name:	Sonja Boon
Degree:	Doctor of Philosophy
Title of Thesis:	Staging the Improper Body: Suzanne Curchod Necker (1737-1794) and the Stigmatization of the Self

Examining Committee:

Chair: **Dr. Marilyn MacDonald**
Assistant Professor of Women's Studies

Dr. Mary Lynn Stewart
Senior Supervisor
Professor of Women's Studies

Dr. Kathy Mezei
Supervisor
Professor of Humanities

Dr. Rosena Davison
Supervisor
Professor of French

Dr. Betty Schellenberg
Internal Examiner
Professor of English

Dr. Valerie Raoul
External Examiner
Professor Emerita of Women's Studies
University of British Columbia

Date Defended/Approved: 12 March 2008

Abstract

This dissertation explores the life and writings of the eighteenth-century Parisian *salonnière*, Suzanne Curchod Necker (1737-1794), from the perspective of corporeal autobiography. In it, I posit the body as a stage upon which identity can be displayed and argue for an understanding of the body as an agentive entity which has the capacity to take an active role in the construction and presentation of the autobiographical self. My work, which analyzes Madame Necker's published and unpublished writings, is mainly concerned with identifying corporeal contradictions; that is, in understanding manifestations of corporeal impropriety as loci for the performance and presentation of self. Looking at the performance of illness in particular, this work suggests that physical suffering functions as a barometer for an individual's psychic perceptions and can be consciously deployed as a strategy for managing social, religious, and cultural exile.

My work identifies four interlocking themes in Madame Necker's life: sociability, religion, illness, and the reproductive body, and seeks to assess the relationships, intersections, and tensions between them, particularly as they emerged in the form of embodied practices. I suggest that the contradictions

between the sociable body (as represented by the irreligious *mondanité* of the French elite) and the Calvinist body (understood through Madame Necker's moral stance) played themselves out in the maternal body, which functioned not only as the site for the realization of true virtue and happiness, but also as the locus of human weakness. The tensions and contradictions between sociable, Calvinist, and maternal bodies converged in the sick body, an entity marked by psychic and somatic suffering which was finally memorialized–in the form of the embalmed cadaver–as the divine body. Ultimately, I argue that the externally-visible corporeal sufferings of Madame Necker's sick body might be conceived as a highly theatrical instance of narcissistic display, evidence of a ritualistic understanding of the symbolic power of the corporeal as a prime site for the performance of abjection and the longing for absolution.

Keywords: corporeal autobiography; abjection; gender; illness; religion; performance

Subject Headings: Necker, Suzanne Curchod, 1739-1794; Women Authors, French – 18th century – Biography; Body, human in literature; Suffering – Religious Aspects; Autobiography – Religious Aspects; Sex role – France – History – 18th century

Dedication

To Stefan and Tóbin

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest thanks and appreciation to everyone who has helped me to complete this project: my research would not have been possible without their encouragement, generosity, and commitment.

To Dr. Mary Lynn Stewart, thank-you for your patience, your high standards, and your sense of humour. Thanks for sharing your insights, experience, and your fascination for the body. I could not have asked for a better mentor and supervisor, and for this I am very grateful. To Dr. Kathy Mezei and Dr. Rosena Davison, thank-you for your consistent encouragement, your care and support, and your probing questions. To my SFU friends and colleagues, in particular, Heather Latimer, Helen Loshny, Byron Lee, and Mary Shearman, thanks for reading various bits and pieces (in some cases, several – thanks, Mary!), for listening to me whinge and whine, and for sharing ideas and laughter.

I also want to express my sincere appreciation to the staff of the Bibliothèque nationale de France and the Archives nationales de France for their help and assistance during my 2006 research trip, to Mme. Danielle Mincio and the staff of the rare books division of the Bibliothèque cantonale et universitaire de Lausanne, Mme. Barbara Roth and the staff of the Salle Sénébier of the Bibliothèque de Genève, and to the cheerful and very enthusiastic archivist of the Archives cantonales vaudoises (Lausanne), for their welcome, assistance, and generosity during my 2007 trip to Switzerland. Finally, to the staff in SFU's Interlibrary Loan division: Nancy Blake, Mirfat Habib, Scott Mackenzie, Sonny Wong, and Vera Yuen, my grateful thanks for processing the most obscure requests for a variety of seventeenth and eighteenth-century works, for locating copies from afar, for discovering treasure troves of previously-unknown electronic editions, and for their neverending patience and goodwill.

I am indebted to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and Simon Fraser University for the funding that made this research possible.

Thank-you to Dr. Dena Goodman for sharing an unpublished article, Dr. Betty Schellenberg for talking through ideas with me at a very early stage, Dr. Stephen Duguid for introducing me to the delights of eighteenth-century French intellectual culture, Dr. June Sturrock for encouragement and support as I considered the leap into doctoral study, and the faculty members of the Department of Women's Studies, in particular: Dr. Cindy Patton for challenging me during my first, awkward months as a doctoral student, and Dr. Helen Leung and Dr. Lara Campbell for their cheerful support and encouragement along the way. My sincere appreciation to the staff of the Women's Studies department: Christine Goodman, Kathryn Hunter, and Roberta Rogers for their efficiency, goodwill, and relaxing conversations, and to thesis assistant Penny Simpson for battling the thesis-formatting demons with me.

Finally, I could not possibly have undertaken this work without the support of my family. Thank-you to Búi Petersen, Stefan Boon-Petersen, and Tóbin Boon-Petersen for sharing laughter, sticky kisses, wet (and other!) bottoms, pinches, pokes, and hugs, and for your unquestioning and completely unconditional love.

Table of Contents

Abbreviations

ACV	Archives cantonales vaudoises
BCUL	Bibliothèque cantonale et universitaire de Lausanne
BGE	Bibliothèque de Genève
BNF	Bibliothèque nationale de France

A Note Concerning Orthography

Early French orthography, as found in sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth-century documents, treatises, conduct books, and literature, differs considerably from contemporary practices. The differences become even greater when one considers manuscript sources. Where possible, I have used original spellings. These remain unmarked in the text, as the frequent use of [sic] can be disruptive and can make the material unwieldy for the reader.

I outline some of the major differences below.

1. "o" vs. "a": "foiblesse" instead of "faiblesse"; "sentois" instead of "sentais"

2. the missing "t": "sentimens" instead of "sentiments"

3. missing apostrophes: "jai l'honneur" instead of "j'ai l'honneur"

4. accent direction: "ma chére mére" instead of "ma chère mère"

5. extra/missing letters: "je scai" instead of "je sais"

Introduction:
Abjection and Display:
Corporeal Performance in the Parisian Salon

Dans la société, c'est le théâtre qui se présente le premier...[1]

Aujourd'hui le théâtre est partout, et chacun se croit en représentation pour faire effet; c'est ce qui corrompt parmi nous le goût des arts comme le goût moral.[2]

Suzanne Curchod Necker (1737-1794) was born in the Swiss village of Crassier, near the French border, on 2 June 1737.[3] Hers was a family of modest means and moral rectitude: her father was a Calvinist minister, and her mother a Huguenot exile who had fled France after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. From

---

[1] Suzanne Curchod Necker, *Mélanges*, 3 vols. (Paris: Pougens, 1798), 1:367.

[2] Antoine-Léonard Thomas, *Oeuvres complètes de Thomas, de l'Académie française; précédées d'une notice sur la vie et les ouvrages de l'auteur*, 6 vols. (Paris: Verdière, 1825), 6:278.

[3] There is some debate around the year of her birth. Her descendant, Paul-Gabriel d'Haussonville, author of *Le Salon de Madame Necker d'après des documents tirés des archives de Coppet*, 2 vols. (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1882), the first comprehensive biography of Suzanne Necker, offers a birth date of 2 June 1737 (1:8), a convention generally followed by subsequent biographers, including Jean-Denis Bredin, author of the most recent biographical foray into the lives of the Curchod-Necker-Staël family (Bredin, *Une singulière famillle: Jacques Necker, Suzanne Necker et Germaine de Staël* [Paris: Fayard, 1999], 21). Dena Goodman, on the other hand, following the Library of Congress identifier, has chosen 1739 (Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994], 310). I have chosen to follow Haussonville's model.

her father, Mademoiselle Curchod received a remarkable education,[4] learning languages (including Latin and Greek), physics, and mathematics, as well as the requisite feminine arts of music and painting.[5] Once launched in Lausanne, she enjoyed social success as a member of numerous sociable circles, among them the *Société du printemps*, and the *Académie des Eaux de la Poudrière*. Here, in 1757, she met Edward Gibbon,[6] with whom she formed her first romantic attachment.[7]

Mademoiselle Curchod's life changed dramatically upon the deaths of her parents in 1760 and 1763. Forced to rely on her own resources, she took on paid work as a governess and later, at the encouragement of close friends, accepted a

---

[4] An early twentieth-century writer commented that: "She had been educated like a man destined to the career of science and letters, and was well acquainted with ancient and modern languages; nor was her knowledge superficial. Not withstanding almost masculine gifts and a powerful but well-directed will, she was essentially feminine" (General John Meredith Read, *Historic Studies in Vaud, Berne, and Savoy*, 2 vols. [London, UK: Chatto & Windus, 1897], 2:284-85).

[5] Haussonville, *Salon*, 1:13-15. While there is enough evidence to suggest that Madame Necker was significantly better educated than many of her contemporaries, there is, equally, research that suggests that the education of young girls in protestant Geneva was considerably higher than that in neighbouring France. For more on this, see E. William Monter, "Women in Calvinist Geneva (1550-1800)," *Signs* 6.2 (1980): 189-209; Chantal Renevey-Fry et al, eds. *En attendant le prince charmant: L'éducation des jeunes filles à Genève, 1740-1970* (Geneva: Service de la recherche en éducation et Musée d'ethnographie, 1997).

[6] Edward Gibbon (1737-1794), best known for his six-volume work, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-1788), was sent to Lausanne at the age of sixteen in order to cure him of his Papish tendencies. The cure was successful and Gibbon converted back to Protestantism in 1754.

[7] See Edward Gibbon, *Gibbon's Journal to January 28th*, 1763, ed. D.M. Low (London: Chatto & Windus, 1929), 6: "*June* [1757]: I saw Mademoiselle Curchod, *omnia vincit amor et nos cedamus amori*." Though Gibbon apparently proposed to Suzanne Curchod in 1758, his desires were thwarted by his father, who threatened to cut Gibbon off financially if he married her. The dénouement of this relationship was long and painful, as demonstrated not only in the letters exchanged by Curchod and Gibbon between the years 1758 and 1763, but also by Jean-Jacques Rousseau's (ultimately failed) intervention, on Mademoiselle Curchod's behalf, in 1763 (Haussonville, *Salon*, 1:65). Gibbon later developed a cordial relationship with Jacques and Suzanne Necker, visiting them on trips to Paris. He maintained a correspondence with Suzanne Necker until his death.

position as the personal companion of a young Parisian widow, Madame de Vermenoux.[8]

Upon her arrival in Paris in 1764, Suzanne Curchod was introduced into a completely foreign social sphere. Elite and *mondaine*, Parisian high society was far removed from her modest Calvinist beginnings in rural Switzerland and she felt completely out of her element. Within a year of her arrival, however, she had fallen in love again, this time with the wealthy Genevan banker, Jacques Necker.[9] Through her marriage, in late 1764, Suzanne Curchod Necker continued to rise in social status. Her husband's political prowess led to a career move from banking to statesmanship: in 1776, he was appointed French finance minister.

This marriage produced only one child, Anne-Louise-Germaine, born on 22 April 1766. Madame Necker dedicated herself wholly to the moral and intellectual development of her daughter, claiming in a later letter to her husband that she had almost never left her daughter's side during the first thirteen years of her life.[10] Germaine Necker, later Madame de Staël, was a precocious child who flourished in her mother's salon and developed into a woman of formidable intellect and considerable charisma.

Even as Madame Necker supported her husband's political achievements and encouraged her daughter's moral and intellectual growth, she too took a prominent

---

[8] Haussonville, *Salon*, 1:97-98. Mademoiselle Curchod appears to have made this decision for economic reasons. Not only did she mention possibilities in England and Germany (Suzanne Curchod, Letter to Edward Gibbon, 4 juin 1763, in Gibbon, *Letters*, 1:149), but Madame Réverdil, too, intervened on her behalf by asking her son Élie-Salomon-François about possibilities in Denmark (Elie-Salomon-François Réverdil, Letter to Henriette Réverdil, 9 Jan. 1764, ms.supp. 718, BGE).

[9] Haussonville, *Salon*, 1:102-110.

[10] Béatrice d'Andlau, *La jeunesse de Madame de Staël (de 1766 à 1786)* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1970), 47.

role within the French elite. Within a year of her marriage, she had established her Friday salon, cultivating an environment that provided an opportunity to engage in her literary desires, while at the same time developing it as an effective vehicle for her husband's political goals and ambitions. Her guests included the academicians Antoine-Léonard Thomas, Jean-François Marmontel, André Morellet, and Jean-Baptiste Suard.[11] During this time she also began to build friendships with other influential elite women, among them the leading Parisian salon women, Madame Geoffrin, Madame du Deffand, and the Marquise de La Ferté-Imbault.[12] In 1778, she took on the leadership of the *Hospice de charité*, an experimental charity hospital, which she directed for over ten years.[13] In 1790, Madame Necker published a short treatise on premature burial;[14] a treatise against divorce followed in 1794.[15] Five

---

[11] Antoine Léonard Thomas (1732-1785), now best known for his treatise on women, *Essai sur le caractere, les moeurs et l'esprit des femmes dans les differents siecles*, published in 1772, was one of Suzanne's closest friends. Together with Jean-François Marmontel (1723-1799), an historian and writer who also contributed numerous articles to the *Encyclopédie*, and André Morellet (1727-1819), a French economist, he was one of the founding members of Madame Necker's salon. Jean-Baptiste-Antoine Suard (1732-1817), an habitué of numerous salons, including those of Necker, Geoffrin, and Lespinasse, is perhaps best known for his direction of numerous eighteenth-century periodicals.

[12] Marie-Thérèse Rodet Geoffrin (1699-1777), the 'grande dame' of the eighteenth-century salon, held two weekly gatherings at her home on the rue St. Honoré in Paris: a Monday salon for artists and connoisseurs, and a Wednesday salon for members of the intelligentsia. Her only child, Marie-Thérèse Geoffrin d'Estampes, Marquise de La Ferté-Imbault (1715-1791), repudiated her philosophical ideals and established a counter-salon, the so-called "Sublime Ordre des Lanturelus," which co-existed alongside her mother's salon in the family home on the rue St. Honoré in Paris. Marie-Anne de Vichy-Chamrond, Marquise du Deffand (1697-1780), meanwhile, hosted a largely aristocratic salon from her rooms in the Couvent St. Joseph on the rue St. Dominique in Paris. Her niece, Julie de Lespinasse, joined her in the salon between 1754 and 1764, and later became a celebrated salon woman in her own right.

[13] Madame Necker was responsible for the published annual accounts. See [Suzanne Curchod Necker], *Hospice de charité* (Paris: Imprimerie royale, 1781); [Suzanne Curchod Necker], *Hospice de charité: institutions, règles, et usages de cette Maison* (Paris: Imprimerie royale, 1780), and the prefaces to the two final accounts, in 1789 and 1790, as found in Suzanne Curchod Necker, *Nouveaux Mélanges*, 2 vols. (Paris: Pougens, 1801), 2:299-316.

[14] Suzanne Curchod Necker, *Des inhumations précipitées* (Paris: Imprimerie royale, 1790).

[15] Suzanne Curchod Necker, *Réflexions sur le divorce* (Lausanne: Durant, Ravanel, et cie; Paris: P.F. Aubin et Desenne, 1794).

volumes of personal writings–the *Mélanges* and *Nouveaux Mélanges*–were published posthumously in 1798 and 1801.

Throughout her many years in the French capital, Madame Necker maintained close ties with her Swiss friends and relations, in particular Etienette Clavel de Brenles,[16] Henriette Réverdil,[17] Elie-Salomon-François Réverdil,[18] and Paul Moultou.[19] The Necker family confirmed their desire to retain ties to their homeland by purchasing the Château de Coppet in 1784.[20]

The family fled France (and the Revolution) in 1790, settling into Coppet, and later the Château de Beaulieu (close to Lausanne). Madame Necker never set foot on French soil again. Four years later, in May 1794, she died at the age of fifty-seven. Her subsequent burial was carried out according to her precise directives: she was embalmed and placed in a vat of alcohol in a small tomb on the grounds of the family château in Coppet.

Madame Necker's was, in many ways, a charmed existence. Her meteoric social ascension from impoverished orphan to esteemed socialite and philanthropist is the stuff of fairytales. Suzanne had it all: beauty, brains, virtue, and the coveted

---

[16] Etienette Clavel de Brenles (1724-1778), nicknamed "la philosophe" by Voltaire, led a salon in Lausanne. Suzanne Curchod made her acquaintance there and the two maintained an active correspondence until Brenles' death.

[17] Henriette Réverdil, *née* Merseille (1705-1779) married Urbain Réverdil in 1729. Her seven children, some of whom Madame Necker counted as friends, were born between 1730 and 1749. She was Magdeleine Curchod's closest friend and, after Madame Curchod's death in 1763, maintained an active correspondence with Suzanne Necker.

[18] Elie-Salomon-François Réverdil (1732-1808), the eldest son of Henriette Réverdil, trained at the *Académie de Genève* before taking up teaching positions in the Danish royal court. He later returned to Switzerland and served in a variety of public positions.

[19] Paul Moultou (ca. 1730-1787), a Genevan minister, secured temporary lodging for Suzanne Curchod after the death of her mother and encouraged her to take up the position with Madame de Vermenoux. He was also a close friend of Jean-Jacques Rousseau: after Rousseau's death, he was entrusted with the publication of all of Rousseau's manuscripts (which appeared in 1782).

[20] The Château is still in the hands of Necker's descendants: its current owner, Othenin d'Haussonville, has renovated eight rooms as a public museum.

prize: a wealthy and politically powerful husband. It seemed almost too good to be true. Her precipitous flight from Paris during the early days of the French Revolution, followed by her tragic, premature death and her spectacular burial, recall the final years of another otherwise charmed life–that of Diana, Princess of Wales–and would appear to be the only fitting end for a woman doomed to a life lived in the public gaze, a gaze which she alternately courted and despised.

Such, at least, is the story told by the majority of Madame Necker's early biographers, from Jacques Necker, who meditated on his late wife's moral virtue in 1798, through to Madame Necker's great-great-grandson Paul-Gabriel d'Haussonville, who, in 1882, published the two-volume work still recognized as the definitive biography of his illustrious ancestor.[21] Most subsequent biographical retellings have followed the path carefully laid by these two members of the Necker family.[22]

While her biography might have been largely shaped by a nineteenth-century desire to recuperate virtuous ancestors,[23] there are nevertheless jarring dissonances. In a tribute to her father's moral goodness, Madame de Staël, for example, referred to her mother's profound physical suffering,[24] a theme later taken up by Staël's son,

---

[21] Jacques Necker, "Observations de l'éditeur," in Suzanne Curchod Necker, *Mélanges*, 3 vols. (Paris: Pougens, 1798), 1:i-xx; Haussonville, *Salon*.

[22] Paul Deschanel, "Madame Necker: Son Salon," in *Figures des Femmes* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1889), 104-175; S.G. Tallentyre, *The Women of the Salons and Other French Portraits* (London, UK: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1901); André Corbaz, *Madame Necker: Humble vaudoise et Grande dame* (Lausanne: Librairie Payot, 1945); Mark Gambier-Parry, *Madame Necker, Her Family and her Friends* (Edinburgh and London, UK: William Blackwood and Sons, 1913).

[23] Philippe Lejeune contends that the proliferation of family autobiographies in the late nineteenth century was directly linked to a desire to maintain the sanctity of the family during a period of perceived moral decline. See Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*. ed Paul John Eakin, trans. Katherine Leary (Minneapolis, USA: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 167.

[24] Germaine de Staël, *Mémoires sur la vie privée de mon père* (Paris: Colburn, 1818).

Auguste.[25] Suzanne Necker's niece (by marriage), Albertine-Adrienne Necker de Saussure, exploring another facet of Madame Necker's character, hinted at her aunt's maternal rigidity.[26] More recent studies of Suzanne Necker's activities delve further into the discordant aspects of her life. Dena Goodman and Valérie Hannin, for example, have probed the troubled relationship between gender, writing, ambition, and publicity as they played themselves out in Madame Necker's writings,[27] and Staël biographers have closely examined Necker's maternal narrative.[28] Others, among them Alexandre Aimes and Berthe Vadier, have taken an indirect route, focussing on Madame Necker's various charitable activities in an attempt to understand her life

---

[25] Auguste de Staël-Holstein, *Notice sur M. Necker* (Paris: Treuttel et Würtz, 1820).

[26] Albertine-Adrienne Necker de Saussure, *Sketch of the Life, Character, and Writings of Baroness de Staël-Holstein* (London: Treuttel and Würtz, 1820).

[27] Ernest Giddey, "Suzanne Necker-Curchod et les lettres anglaises," *Revue historique vaudoise* (1981) 49-56; Dena Goodman, "Le Spectateur intérieur: les journaux de Suzanne Necker," *Littérales* 17 (1995): 91-100; Dena Goodman, "Suzanne Necker's Mélanges: Gender, Writing, and Publicity," in *Going Public: Women and Publishing in Early Modern France*, eds. Elizabeth C. Goldsmith and Dena Goodman (Ithaca, USA and London, UK: Cornell University Press, 1995), 211-23; Valérie Hannin, "Une ambition de femme au siècle des Lumières," *Cahiers staëliens* 36 (1985): 5-19; Geneviève Soumoy-Thibert, "Les idées de Madame Necker," *Dix-huitième Siècle* 21 (1989): 357-68.

[28] Béatrice d'Andlau, *La jeunesse de Madame de Staël* (Paris, France and Geneva, Switzerland: Librairie Droz, 1970); Charlotte Julia von Leyden, Lady Blennerhassett, *Madame de Staël et son temps*, 2 vols. (Paris: Louis Westhausser, 1890); Ghislain de Diesbach, *Madame de Staël* (Paris: Librairie académique Perrin, 1983); Maria Fairweather, *Madame de Staël* (London: Constable, 2005); Madelyn Gutwirth, *Madame de Staël, novelist: The Emergence of the Artist as Woman* (Urbana, USA: University of Illinois Press, 1978); Madelyn Gutwirth, "Suzanne Necker's Legacy: Breastfeeding as Metonym in Germaine de Staël's *Delphine*," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 18.2 (2004): 17-40; Pierre Kohler, *Madame de Staël et la Suisse* (Lausanne: Payot, 1916); J. Christopher Herold, *Mistress to an Age: A Life of Madame de Staël* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1958).

and motivations.[29] Léonard Burnand, finally, has examined her public image as it was propagated in libellous pamphlets of the period.[30]

The unpublished writings of Madame Necker suggest, however, that there remains at least one more story to be told. These letters, the majority of which are contained in two manuscript collections in Lausanne and Geneva,[31] present a woman of profound religious faith whose internal moral turmoil functioned as the impetus for a life of physical suffering.[32] Even as these letters play into the principles of display so integral to eighteenth-century sociability and sensibility, they also attest to Madame Necker's deep ambivalence towards French social values and conventions, to the centrality of her cultural and religious heritage in her life, and to an embodied sense of self which revelled in the deep sensibility of corporeal suffering. To date, nobody

---

[29] Alexandre Aimes, "Le séjour de Madame Necker à Montpellier: Fondation de l'hôpital Necker de Montpellier," *Histoire des sciences médicales* 8 (1974): 477-89; Georges Benrekassa, "Diderot et l'honnête femme: de Mme Necker à Eliza Draper," in *Colloque International Diderot (1713-1784)*, ed. Anne-Marie Chouillet (Paris: Aux amateurs de livres, 1995), 87-97; J. Faurey, *Madame Necker et la question du divorce* (Bordeaux: J. Bière, 1931); Valérie Hannin, "La fondation de l'hospice de charité: Une expérience médicale au temps du rationalisme expérimentale," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 31 (1984): 116-30; Lucette Pérol, "Diderot, Mme Necker et la réforme des hôpitaux," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 311 (1993): 219-232; Berthe Vadier, "La mère de Mme de Staël et sa parenté au pays de Vaud," *Etrennes helvétiques* (1901): 287-324; Janet Whatley, "Dissoluble Marriage, Paradise Lost: Suzanne Necker's *Réflexions sur le divorce*." *Dalhousie French Studies* 56 (2001): 144-53.

[30] Léonard Burnand, "L'image de Madame Necker dans les pamphlets," *Cahiers staëliens* 57 (2006): 237-54.

[31] The archival collections at the Bibliothèque de Genève (BGE) and the Bibliothèque cantonale et universitaire de Lausanne (BCUL) hold particularly rich materials relevant to the life of Suzanne Curchod Necker.

[32] See in particular, ms.suppl.717, BGE and IS1915/xxx/h/1, BCUL.

has examined the relationship between gender, piety, and illness as they manifested themselves in her life and on her body.[33]

This dissertation explores the life and writings of Suzanne Curchod Necker from the perspective of corporeal autobiography. In it, I posit the body as a stage upon which identity can be displayed and argue for an understanding of the body as an agentive entity that has the capacity to take an active role in the construction and presentation of the autobiographical self. My research, which analyzes Madame Necker's published and unpublished writings, is mainly concerned with identifying corporeal contradictions; that is, in understanding manifestations of corporeal impropriety as loci for the performance and presentation of self. Looking at the performance of illness and suffering in particular, this analysis suggests that physical debilitation can function as a barometer for an individual's psychic perceptions and can be consciously deployed as a strategy for managing social, religious, and cultural exile.[34]

My work identifies four interlocking themes in Madame Necker's life: sociability, religion, illness, and the reproductive body, and seeks to assess the relationships, intersections, and tensions between them, particularly as they emerged in the form of embodied practices. I suggest that the contradictions

---

[33] Antoine de Baecque and Paola Vecchi, have, however, examined embodiment in the context of Madame Necker's *Des inhumations précipitées* (1790). See Antoine de Baecque, *Glory and Terror: Seven Deaths under the French Revolution*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (New York: Routledge, 2001); Paola Vecchi, "De la mort à la vie: La taphophobie et l'au-delà au XVIIIe siècle (Jean-Jacques Bruhier et Suzanne Curchod Necker)," in *Transhumances culturelles: Mélanges*, ed. Corrado Rosso (Pisa: Editrice Libreria Goliardica, 1985), 119-30.

[34] I am indebted to the insights of G. Thomas Couser, who argues strongly for the disruptive agency of the suffering body (G. Thomas Couser, "Autopathography: Women, Illness, and Lifewriting," *a/b: Auto/biography Studies* 6. 1 (1991): 65-75. For more on this, see G. Thomas Couser, *Recovering Bodies: Illness, Disability, and Life Writing* (Madison, USA: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997); Valerie Raoul et al, eds. *Unfitting Stories: Narrative Approaches to Disease, Disability, and Trauma* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2007).

between the sociable body (as represented by the irreligious *mondanité* of the French elite) and the Calvinist body (understood through Madame Necker's moral stance) played themselves out in the maternal body, which functioned not only as the site for the realization of true virtue and happiness, but also as the locus of human weakness. The tensions and contradictions between sociable, Calvinist, and maternal bodies converged in the sick body, an entity marked by psychic and somatic suffering which was finally memorialized–in the form of the embalmed cadaver–as the divine body. Ultimately, I argue that the externally visible corporeal sufferings of Madame Necker's sick body might be conceived as a highly theatrical instance of narcissistic display, evidence of a ritualistic understanding of the symbolic power of the corporeal as a prime site for the performance of abjection and the longing for absolution.

The raw material for this project is extensive. Suzanne Necker's previously mentioned published oeuvre has provided a rich foundation for this research. The correspondence between Madame Necker and various members of the European intelligentsia, among them Rousseau, Voltaire, Gibbon, Thomas, and Buffon is also readily available.[35] In addition to this, some 250 unpublished letters remain in archival collections in Lausanne and Geneva. Finally, there is much contemporaneous contextual material. As a well-known member of the Parisian elite, Madame Necker is mentioned in many of the personal memoirs dating from the

---

[35] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Correspondance complète de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, ed. R.A. Leigh, 52 vols. (Geneva: Institut et musée Voltaire, 1965-1995); François Marie Arouet de Voltaire, *The Complete Works of Voltaire*, ed. Theodore Besterman et al, 141 vols. (Geneva: Institut et musée Voltaire; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968-); Edward Gibbon, *Letters*, ed. J.E. Norton, 3 vols. (London: Cassell, 1956); Antoine Léonard Thomas, *Oeuvres complètes de Thomas, de l'Académie française; précédées d'une notice sur la vie et les ouvrages de l'auteur*, 6 vols. (Paris: Verdière, 1825); Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, *Correspondance inédite de Buffon*, ed. Henri Nadault de Buffon, 2 vols. (Paris: Hachette, 1860).

period,[36] appears in such periodical literature as Grimm's *Correspondance littéraire*,[37] and Bachaumont's *Mémoires secrèts*,[38] and was the subject of a series of libellous pamphlets.[39]

This body of work provides ample evidence to sustain the biographical telling which has been propagated by the Haussonville cohort: Madame Necker was, indeed, a central figure of the French Enlightenment and her public concern for the welfare of the poor and indigent in her society is a testament to her innate and irrefutable (feminine) virtue.

It also reveals something more: a woman consumed by mental and physical torment and suffering. References to Madame Necker's continual sufferings are scattered throughout her correspondence. Some 63% of her letters to Etienette Clavel de Brenles and 44% of the letters to Henriette Réverdil make direct mention of her illnesses, as do approximately 42% of her extant letters to Antoine-Léonard

---

[36] See, for example: Ekaterina Romanovna Dashkova, *The Memoirs of Princess Dashkova*, trans. Kyril Fitzlyon. (Durham, USA and London, UK: Duke University Press, 1995); Stéphanie Félicité Ducrest de Saint Aubin, Comtesse de Genlis, *Mémoires inédits de madame la Comtesse De Genlis, sur le dix-huitième siècle et la révolution française, depuis 1756 jusqu'à nos jours*, 10 vols. (Brussels: P.J. de Mat, 1825); André Morellet, *Mémoires inédits de l'abbé Morellet*, 2 vols. (Paris: Baudouin, 1822); Henriette-Louise de Waldner de Freundstein, Baronne d'Oberkirch, *Mémoires de la Baronne d'Oberkirch*, 2 vols. (Paris: Charpentier, 1869).

[37] Friedrich Melchior, Freiherr von Grimm, *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique*, 16 vols. (Paris: Garnier frères, 1877).

[38] Louis Petit de Bachaumont, *Mémoires secrets pour servir à l'histoire de la République des Lettres en France depuis MDCCLXII, ou Journal d'un observateur, contenant les analyses des pièces de théâtre qui ont paru durant cet intervalle, les relations des assemblée littéraires...*, 36 vols. (London: John Adamson, 1783-1789; Eighteenth Century Collections Online), http://galenet.galegroup.com.proxy.lib.sfu.ca/servlet/ECCO.

[39] See, for example: *Les deux conversations de Madame Necker* (Geneva: Cruchaut, 1781); *La galérie des dames françoises* (London, 1798).

Thomas.[40] Madame Necker also represents her torments indirectly through the regular use of a secretary. While she may have called on secretarial services in order to handle the extensive correspondence required of her social position and political status more efficiently, she offered another explanation, suggesting in her personal letters that her physical weakness and frail health sometimes made it impossible for her to pen letters herself.[41] This approach is evident in her formal correspondence. Four letters dating from the early 1790s, and obviously written by a secretary, nevertheless include Madame Necker's frail, thready, and unstable signature,[42] thus providing further proof of her physical distress even in the absence of direct textual references. Illness is directly mentioned by Madame Necker, her family, or her friends in at least one letter per year, almost without interruption, between 1764, the year of her arrival in Paris, and 1794, the year of her death.[43] The inclusion of letters written by secretaries further expands this total.[44] Thus, even as Suzanne's close friend Antoine-Léonard Thomas exclaimed in a 1785 letter: "Si je ne connaissais, madame, toute l'activité de votre esprit, au milieu même des langueurs et des souffrances,

---

[40] Madame Necker's correspondence with Thomas can be found in the *Mélanges*, 2:124-126, 2:130-138; 3:157-218. For more on this correspondence, see Nadine Bérenguier, "Lettres de Suzanne Necker à Antoine Thomas (1766-1785),"in *Lettres de femmes: Textes inedits et oubliés du XVIe au XVIIIe siècle*, eds. Elizabeth C. Goldsmith and Colette H. Winn (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2005), 339-378.

[41] "Pardon madame si je me sers dune main etrangere. Une incomodité moins dangereuse que la precedente mais plus importune ne me permést pas de tenir la plume" (Suzanne Curchod Necker, Letter to Etienette Clavel de Brenles, ce 10 7bre 1765, IS1915/xxx/h/3, BCUL; see also Golowkin, *Lettres diverses, recueillies in Suisse* [Geneva and Paris: Paschoud, 1821], 269).

[42] Suzanne Curchod Necker, Letters to M. de Sévery, Rolle ce 11 8bre 1792, Coppet ce 25 juillet 1793, Copet le 6 8bre 1793, Lausanne ce 6 Xbre 1793, P. Charrière de Sévery, B117/3192-3195, ACV.

[43] In the extant correspondence, there is no mention of illness in 1770, 1774. 1780, 1787, 1789, and 1791.

[44] Unfortunately, it is not always possible to access the manuscript version; Necker's extensive correspondence with Georges Louis LeSage, for example, published early in the nineteenth century, does not indicate whether the letters are signed or unsigned or if they are penned by Necker herself or by a secretary. See Pierre Prévost, ed.: *Notice sur la vie et les écrits de Georges-Louis LeSage* (Geneva and Paris: Paschoud, 1805), which includes ten letters from Madame Necker to LeSage.

votre lettre du 11 février m'aurait presque fait douter que vous fussiez malade. La vie et la santé sont à chaque ligne,"[45] her sufferings were ever-present in her life.

Illness was a common trope in the correspondence of sensibility, and writers of the time frequently resorted to recitations of their various ailments.[46] Madame Necker's case, however, is somewhat different. Not only are her autobiographical writings confirmed and reinforced by the concern of close friends, the observations of her family members–particularly her daughter, Germaine de Staël–and the recollections of her contemporaries,[47] but they are further highlighted by her decision to become actively involved in French hospital reform and her accompanying interest in the sanctity of the dying body. The prevalence of illness in her autobiographical writings, combined with the testimony of her family, friends, and contemporaries, and her public work with the suffering poor of her community, suggests–even demands–further examination.

In order to address the relationships between the sociable, Calvinist, reproductive, and suffering bodies, I engage with two main theoretical lenses:

---

[45] Thomas, *Oeuvres complètes*, 6:458.

[46] See, for example, the correspondence of Voltaire, as found in Voltaire, *The Complete Works of Voltaire*, ed. Theodore Besterman et al, 141 vols. (Geneva: Institut et musée Voltaire; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968-).

[47] See, for example, the correspondence of Thomas and Buffon, as found in: Antoine-Léonard Thomas, *Oeuvres complètes de Thomas, de l'Académie française; précédées d'une notice sur la vie et les ouvrages de l'auteur*, vol. 6 (Paris: Verdière, 1825) and Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, *Correspondance inédite de Buffon*, ed. Henri Nadault de Buffon, 2 vols. (Paris: Hachette, 1860); the references in Germaine de Staël, *Correspondance générale*, ed. B. W. Jasinski, 4 vols. (Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1962-1978) and Germaine de Staël, *Mémoires sur la vie privée de mon père* (Paris: Colburn, 1818); the recollections of Albertine-Adrienne Necker de Saussure, who reported in 1787 that, "Mme Necker [se tenait] debout à l'autre coin, ayant un balancement continuel causé par des inquiétudes dans les jambes" (Quoted in: Etienne Causse, *Madame Necker de Saussure et l'Education Progressive*, 2 vols. [Paris: Editions "Je sers," 1930], 1:64), and the words of Laure Junot, Duchesse d'Abrantès: "Madame Necker avait naturellement un son de voix très grave, mais aussi parfaitement doux....son état de maladie rendait son timbre encore plus doux" (Junot, Duchesse d'Abrantès, *Histoire des salons de Paris: Tableaux et portraits du grand monde, sous Louis XVI, le Directoire, le Consulat et l'Empire, la Restauration, et le règne de Louis-Philippe Ier*, 6 vols. [Paris: Ladvocat, 1837-1838], 1:84).

feminist theories of the body and performance studies theories. I draw particular inspiration from the ways in which both feminist theory and performance studies theories have sought not only to understand embodied forms of knowledge, but also, to integrate such phenomenological understandings[48] into the project of so-called 'rational' scholarship. This double framework, which emphasizes the performative nature of the body, enables me to draw attention to aspects of eighteenth-century sociable relationships, autobiographical practices, and embodied experiences that have, to date, remained largely unexplored.

Within the area of feminist theory, I focus most closely on theoretical formulations put forward by Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, and Hélène Cixous. The approach taken by these scholars, deploying a theoretical model founded upon understandings of radical sexual difference, most closely aligns itself with the cultural models proposed within the eighteenth century itself.[49] As scholars such as Thomas Laqueur, Londa Schiebinger, and Lieselotte Steinbrügge have pointed out, the eighteenth century was a crucial period in the development of modern

---

[48] The *Oxford English Dictionary Online* defines "phenomenology" as: "any of various philosophical methods or theories (often influenced by the work of [Edmund] Husserl and his followers) which emphasize the importance of analysing the structure of conscious subjective experience" (*OED Online* s.v. "phenomenology," http://dictionary.oed.com.proxy.lib.sfu.ca/cgi/entry/50177323 [accessed January 16, 2008]).

[49] Eighteenth-century thinkers idenitified women with domestic concerns of home and family, attributing to them such characteristics as humility, piety, grace, and charm. Women were also perceived as volatile, capricious entities whose unstable tendencies, left unchecked, could pose a threat to social stability. See, for example, the models of ideal womanhood proposed in Antoine-Léonard Thomas, *Essai sur le caractère, les moeurs et l'esprit des femmes dans les différens siècles* (Paris: Moutard, 1772); Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Julie, ou, La nouvelle Héloïse: lettres de deux amants habitants d'une petite ville au pied des Alpes* (Paris: Le livre de poche, 2002); Denis Diderot, "Sur les Femmes," *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. J. Assézat (Paris, 1875), 251-262; M. Desmahis, "Femme (*Morale*)," *Encyclopédie*, 6:475.

understandings of sexual difference.[50] Laqueur argues that the eighteenth century witnessed the emergence of a two-sex model of human relationships, a process whereby the one-sex model, in which sexual identity was conceived along a sort of continuum, gave way to a model that prioritized radical sexual difference. Schiebinger's study of the development of the female skeleton bears this out. In particular, she points out that anatomists involved in crafting a model of female anatomy dedicated themselves not to scientific objectivity, but rather to a culturally-received understanding of 'ideal womanhood.' Tracing the work of the German physician Samuel Thomas von Soemmerring, who designed and crafted the proportions of his female anatomical drawings not only after extant physical skeletons, but also after "the classical statues of the Venus de Medici and Venus of Dresden,"[51] she suggests that Soemmerring's method offers clear proof of the ways in which cultural lenses and assumptions were marshalled in the service of an otherwise purely 'scientific' project. Lieselotte Steinbrügge, too, demonstrates the ways in which scientific rationalism colluded with cultural assumptions in order to create a 'naturalized' female other who was wholly dependent on–and subservient to–the whims of a capricious biology.[52]

---

[50] Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, USA and London, UK: Harvard University Press, 1990); Londa Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex? Women in the Origins of Modern Science* (Cambridge, USA and London, UK: Harvard University Press, 1989); Lieselotte Steinbrügge, *The Moral Sex: Woman's Nature in the French Enlightenment*, trans. Pamela E. Selwyn (New York, USA and Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1995).

[51] Schiebinger, *Mind Has No Sex?*, 200. See also her article, "Skeletons in the Closet: The First Illustrations of the Female Skeleton in Eighteenth-Century Anatomy," *Representations* 14 (Spring, 1986), 42-82.

[52] "[W]oman is not an *homme manqué*. Instead, her membership in the female sex shapes her entire physical and psychic constitution, which differs in every respect from man's" (Steinbrügge, *Moral Sex*, 43).

The feminist model, as propagated by Irigaray, Kristeva, and Cixous, offers clear possibilities for resistance to–and subversion of–the premises of hierarchichalized sexual difference as promoted and practiced during the eighteenth century. Irigarayan mimesis, Kristevan abjection, and Cixousian laughter all rely on the claiming of corporeal alterity as a site of possibility and transformation. Each of these theorists posits the female body, and in particular, the reproductive female body, as the site of such alterity, a positioning that has enabled a recognition of the inherent value of the marginalized body.

Understanding the transformative potential of the stigmatized body has been integral to my work. Drawing on Erving Goffman's codification of stigma, I suggest that Madame Necker, marked by her gender, culture, class, religion, and suffering, experienced stigma on numerous levels.[53] There is no doubt that the experience of stigma limited her life. At the same time, her letters also contain clear evidence of what Hélène Cixous asserts as the revolutionary power of stigmata.[54] It is, ultimately, this agency that informs my work. The work of a group of Swiss medical historians,

---

[53] In *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (Englewood Cliffs, USA: Prentice Hall, 1963), Erving Goffman identifies three types of stigma: "First there are the abominations of the body – the various physical deformities. Next there are blemishes of individual character...[which are] inferred from a known record of, for example, mental disorder, imprisonment, addiction, alcoholism, homosexuality, unemployment, suicidal attempts, and radical political behavior. Finally there are the tribal stigma of race, nation, and religion, these being stigma that can be transmitted through lineages and equally contaminate all members of a family" (4). Goffman further argues that stigma can be both externally and internally imposed, so that it becomes possible for stigmata to be simultaneously understood as marks of belonging (46).

[54] "Stigma stings, pierces, makes holes, separates with pinched marks and in the same movement distinguishes, – re-marks – inscribes, writes. Stigma wounds *and* spurs, stimulates. Stigma hallmarks, for the best and for the worst: stigmata on the body are as noble as they are ignominious, depending on whether it is Christ or the outcast who is marked" (Hélène Cixous, *Stigmata*, trans. Eric Prenowitz et al [London and New York: Routledge, 1998], xiii).

who argue strongly and convincingly for the authority of both patient and ailing body, has been particularly influential in this regard.[55]

The stigmatized body was located within a culture of display. Indeed, its stigmatized state emerged from the fraught encounter between spectacle and gaze. As such this body was a performative entity, whose actions mimicked the contours of cultural and social convention even as they actively resisted them.[56] It is precisely the possibility of mimetic parody or citation that makes French feminist theory possible; it is, equally, Judith Butler's postulation of a tense but symbiotic relationship between *pre*-formance and *per*-formance, that enables us to understand the nature of performativity and the performative body. Following the theoretical understandings put forward by Irigaray, Cixous, and, in particular, Kristeva, the performative enables the taking on of a masquerade and the claiming of alterity–or stigma–as a space from which to speak.

This emphasis on stigma and alterity can also be understood through the frame of abjection, which functions as an organizing premise of this work. The abject, which Julia Kristeva has defined as the point of splitting, is the moment of suspension between life and death, an instant associated with intense loss, and, at

---

[55] See, for example, Micheline Louis-Courvoisier and Sévérine Pilloud, who have done considerable research into the medical correspondence of the Swiss doctor, Samuel-Auguste-André-David Tissot: Séverine Pilloud and Micheline Louis-Courvoisier, "The Intimate Experience of the Body in the Eighteenth-Century: Between Interiority and Exteriority," *Journal of Medical History* 47 (2003): 451-72; Séverine Pilloud, "Mettre les maux en mots, médiations dans la consultation épistolaire au XVIIIe siècle: les maladies du Dr. Tissot (1728-1797)," *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History/Bulletin canadien d'histoire de la médecine* 16 (1999): 214-45; Séverine Pilloud, "Tourisme médical à Lausanne dans la seconde moitié du XVIIIe siècle," *Revue historique vaudoise* 114 (2006):9-23.

[56] I build here on the ideas of Judith Butler, who argues that gender can be both *pre*-formed and *per*-formed, such that a parodic *per*-formance, which mimics the *pre*-formance, can disrupt, displace and re-signify meaning (Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40.4 (1988), 519-31; Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* [New York and London: Routledge, 1993]).

the same time, overwhelming desire: "the corpse, the most sickening of wastes...a border that has encroached upon everything."[57] For Kristeva, the abject is a point of horror, an encounter with the sublime which reveals not only its profound potential, but also the abyss of nothingness that is its mirror. In this study, I suggest that Madame Necker's stigmatized body serves as a site of critical abjection, a space in which Parisian elite society was forced to confront its own limitations, and at the same time, in which Madame Necker confronted her personal demons.

The performance of abjection requires both a stage and an audience. During the French eighteenth century, that stage was, indisputably, the salon. A gathering place for intellectual debate and theatre for sociable display, the eighteenth-century salon was the institution *par excellence* of elite sociability and identity formation. Led by a woman of means and peopled by members of the aristocracy, intelligentsia, and cultured and connected foreigners, it was an intensely performative space governed by a detailed code of behaviours and practices that sought to define the parameters of the sociable body. Assessing and analyzing the nature of salon practices is, however, a daunting task, particularly when one considers the inherent transience and intangibility of salon conversation and the cultural and historical specificity and nuance of elite sociable behaviours.

The historiography of the French salon and its culture dates back to the early years of the nineteenth century, when writers such as Laure Junot, Duchesse d'Abrantès, and others, eager to capitalize on a general nostalgia for the *ancien régime*, published intimate and personal works which recalled the behaviours and

---

[57] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 3.

practices of the French aristocracy.[58] The various writings of Sainte-Beuve and the Goncourt brothers, dating from the mid-nineteenth century, offered another interpretation of the salon. Firmly identifying salon culture with literary expression, they placed salon women on a pedestal, presenting them as embodiments of the eternal feminine.[59] Later nineteenth- and early twentieth-century evocations focussed on single salon women. Drawing on surviving correspondence and published memoirs, writers such as Paul-Gabriel d'Haussonville and Pierre de Ségur penned extensive and detailed biographies of illustrious women such as Madame Necker and Madame Geoffrin, and offered titillating insights into the private life of Julie de Lespinasse.[60]

The extensive scholarship of Dena Goodman, dating from the 1980s and 1990s, inaugurated a new era of research into the nature of the salon and its hostesses. Goodman, building on the theoretical frameworks proposed by Jürgen

---

[58] See, for example, general studies of salon culture such as Laure Junot, Duchesse d'Abrantès, *Histoire des salons de Paris: Tableaux et portraits du grand monde, sous Louis XVI, le Directoire, le Consulat et l'Empire, la Restauration, et le règne de Louis-Philippe Ier*, 6 vols. (Paris: Ladvocat, 1837-1838); and the memoirs and personal recollections of such women as Elisabeth Vigée-Le Brun, the Comtesse de Boigne, the Comtesse de Genlis and the Marquise de La Tour du Pin, among others, which provide detailed – and often perceptive – insights into the nature of elite sociable practices during the second half of the eighteenth century (Louise-Eléonore-Charlotte-Adélaide d'Osmond, Comtesse de Boigne, *Mémoires de la Comtesse de Boigne née d'Osmond* [Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1908]; Louise-Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, *Souvenirs* [Paris: Des Femmes, 1984]; Henriette Lucy Dillon, Marquise de La Tour du Pin, *Mémoires de la Marquise de La Tour du Pin : Journal d'une femme de cinquante ans, 1778-1846*, ed. Christian de Liederkerke Beaufort [Paris: Mercure de France, 2002]; Stéphanie Félicité Ducrest de Saint Aubin, Comtesse de Genlis, *Mémoires inédits de madame la Comtesse de Genlis, sur le dix-huitième siècle et la révolution française, depuis 1756 jusqu'à nos jours*, 10 vols. [Brussels: P.J. de Mat, 1825]).

[59] Sainte-Beuve, *Causeries du lundi*; Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *La femme au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1887), and Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Histoire de la société française pendant la révolution* (Paris: Didier, 1864).

[60] Haussonville, *Salon*; Pierre Marie Maurice Henri, Comte de Ségur, *Le royaume de la rue Saint-Honoré: Madame Geoffrin et sa fille* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1897); Pierre Marie Maurice Henri, Comte de Ségur, *Julie de Lespinasse* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1905).

Habermas,[61] posited the sociability of the salon within the idea of democratization, suggesting that the practices of elite sociability, in particular the ideas of mutual respect and deference, were essential to crafting a society of equals in the face of glaring and sometimes almost insurmountable class differences.[62] In Goodman's research, the salon emerges as a subversive force which countered the hegemony of the state-controlled public sphere through the enlightened interaction of rational beings. The *salonnière*, previously positioned merely as a successful social convenor and firmly ensconced in the private, domestic sphere,[63] hereby gained an independent voice and the authority not only to be heard, but also to play an active role in the conception and dissemination of public opinion.

More recent work on French *salonnières* would suggest, however, that such a neat move from public sphere theory to the actual practice of elite sociability might

---

[61] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, USA: MIT Press, 1991).

[62] Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca, New York and London: Cornell University Press, 1994). Dena Goodman has based the entire body of her work on the Parisian salon on the Habermas framework. See, for example, "Enlightenment Salons: The Convergence of Female and Philosophic Ambitions." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 22.3 (1989): 329-50; "Policing Society: Women as Political Actors in the Enlightenment Discourse," in *Conceptualising Women in Enlightenment Thought/Conceptualiser la femme dans la pensée des Lumières*, eds. Hans Erich Bödeker and Lieselotte Steinbrügge (Berlin: Berlin Verlag Arno Spitz GmbH, 2001), 129-41; "Public Sphere and Private Life: Toward a Synthesis of Current Historiographical Approaches to the Old Regime," *History and Theory* 31.1 (1992): 1-20; "Suzanne Necker's *Mélanges* : Gender, Writing, and Publicity", in *Going Public: Women and Publishing in Early Modern France*. eds. Elizabeth C. Goldsmith and Dena Goodman (Ithaca, USA and London, UK: Cornell University Press, 1995), 211-23.

[63] See, for example, Janet Aldis, *Madame Geoffrin: Her Salon and her Times, 1750-1777* (New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons and Methuen and Co., 1905); Helen Clergue, *The Salon: A Study of French Society and Personalities in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: G.P. Putnam's & Sons, 1907); Alan Charles Kors, *D'Holbach's Coterie: An Enlightenment in Paris* (Princeton, USA: Princeton University Press, 1976); Ségur, *Royaume*.

not so easily be accomplished. The work of Jolanta Pekacz and Catherine Dubeau,[64] for example, stresses the dominating role of social propriety and contends that the salon was a theatrical space in which each actor played a prescribed role: "the individual was expected to incarnate characteristics considered appropriate for his or her social position, gender, age, marital status and circumstances."[65] Pekacz and Dubeau understand the salon space as a static environment in which spontaneity was discouraged and little social mobility was possible. In this inherently exclusionary environment, the rules of the game functioned as gates demarcating the boundaries of acceptable behaviour and defined the parameters of proper bodies and proper objects.

The case of Madame Necker offers a significant example of social and cultural impropriety. Madame Necker's domestic actions, in particular her decision to mother her daughter within the salon, re-imagined the space of the salon. By inscribing it in domestic–rather than public–terms, Necker's maternal salon reveals another layer of eighteenth-century sociability. It reminds us that the salon, as a physical entity, was more than an extension of the public sphere; it was also, at the same time, an

---

[64] Catherine Dubeau, "L'Épreuve du salon ou Le Monde comme performance dans les *Mélanges* et les *Nouveaux Mélanges* de Suzanne Necker," *Cahiers staëliens* 57 (2006): 201-226; Jolanta T. Pekacz, *Conservative Tradition in Pre-Revolutionary France* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1999); "The French Salon of the Old Regime as a Spectacle," *Lumen: Selected Proceedings from the Canadian Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Volume XXII (2001): 83-102; "Gender as Political Orientation: Parisian Salonnières and the Querelle des Bouffons," *Canadian Journal of History/Annales canadiennes d'histoire* XXXII (1997): 405-14; "Salon Women and the Quarrels about Opera in Eighteenth-Century Paris," *The European Legacy: Towards New Paradigms* 1.4 (1996): 1608-14; and "The Salonnières and the Philosophes in Old Regime France: The Authority of Aesthetic Judgement," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 60.2 (1999): 277-97. The recent work of Steven Kale relies on the Pekacz model: Steven D. Kale, *French Salons: High Society and Political Sociability from the Old Regime to the Revolution of 1848* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004); Steven D. Kale, "Women, the Public Sphere, and the Persistence of Salons," *French Historical Studies* 25. 1 (2002): 115-48; Steven D. Kale, "Women, Salons, and the State in the Aftermath of the French Revolution," Journal of *Women's History* 134 (2002): 54-80.

[65] Jolanta Pekacz, "Spectacle," 87.

intimate, domestic space.[66] Located within the home, the salon was a space governed not by the king, but rather by the *maîtresse de maison*–the woman of the house–most often a wife and mother fulfilling a socially sanctioned cultural role.[67] In addition to this, it was, as Sherry McKay has observed, an architecturally gendered space, imprinted with cultural associations of ideal femininity.[68] As a space both socially and physically marked by gender, it existed as much outside the public sphere as within it.

The hybrid nature of the salon made it a difficult space for women to navigate, requiring them to negotiate contradictory personal impulses and paradoxical cultural paradigms. Questions surrounding feminine ambition, maternal authority, civic responsibility, and religious duty, therefore, were not only read through the ever-shifting backdrop of eighteenth-century ideals, but also through the lens of physical space and display; in other words, through a framework which recognized the troublingly indefinable nature of the salon.

This emphasis on performativity, display, and masquerade necessitates a deeper understanding of the nature of performance itself. For this, I turn to the conceptual frameworks provided by scholars in performance studies. Marvin Carlson, drawing on the work of Erving Goffman, has observed that "[t]he recognition that our

---

[66] Annick Pardailhé-Galabrun notes an ever-increasing interest in the cultivation of domestic space during the course of the eighteenth century (Annik Pardailhé-Galabrun, *The Birth of Intimacy: Privacy and Domestic Life in Early Modern Paris*, trans. Jocelyn Phelps [Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1991]).

[67] Pekacz asserts that the salon was "not a sphere which a salonnière designed for herself to fulfill her social and intellectual aspirations and free herself from male tutelage, but rather a niche in which society allowed her to function on the assumption that she would not violate the bienséance appropriate for her sex by illegitimate claims" (Pekacz, *Conservative Tradition*, 12).

[68] Sherry McKay, "The 'Salon de la Princesse': 'Rococo' Design, Ornamented Bodies and the Public Sphere," *Revue d'art canadienne/Canadian Art Review* XXI, no. 1-2 (1994): 71-84.

lives are structured according to repeated and socially sanctioned modes of behavior raises the possibility that all human activity could potentially be considered as 'performance.'"[69] Indeed, Erin Striff observes that culture is "unthinkable without performance."[70]

My dissertation draws its inspiration from the idea that all autobiographical acts are negotiated on a public stage in full view of an audience. In this sense, I suggest that performance might be most fruitfully understood, on a broad level, as a collaborative venture between audience and performer, as read through the lens of culture. Indeed, as Carlson observes, performance "is always performance *for* someone, some audience that recognizes and validates it as performance even when, as is occasionally the case, that audience is the self."[71] Such an argument suggests a need to reconsider the traditionally hierarchical relationship between performance and audience, spectacle and gaze. Specifically, this perspective gestures towards a more fluid encounter, in which authority is constantly shifting and power relationships are never certain, but instead, always in process, and always being negotiated.[72]

But this argument also suggests something more. The relationship between Butlerian performativity and Kristevan abjection, as read through the lens of

---

[69] Marvin Carlson, "What is Performance?" in *Performance Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Bial, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 72. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1959), Erving Goffman writes: "I have been using the term 'performance' to refer to all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers" (22).

[70] Erin Striff, ed. *Performance Studies* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 1.

[71] Marvin Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1996), 6.

[72] This premise of 'instability' also holds true for the field of performance studies as a whole. As Henry Bial observes: "Just as performance is contingent, contested, hard to pin down, so too is its study" (Henry Bial, "Introduction," in *Performance Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Bial, 2nd ed. [London and New York: Routledge, 2007], 1).

performance, enables a fundamental repositioning of one of the central tenets of the eighteenth-century sociable ideal: the mirror. During the French eighteenth century, the mirror functioned as the metaphor for elite sociable behaviour. By conforming to the accepted models of elite sociability, the elite body mirrored the seemingly innate beauty, balance, and 'rightness' of polite society as a whole, offering a pleasing, reflective surface that confirmed the cohesion and authority of the aristocratic class. Madame Necker's contradictory behaviours troubled social conventions. By actively resisting the lure of the sociable mirror even as she acquiesced to its seductions, Madame Necker transformed reflection into specularity, thus destabilizing the internal coherence of the sociable ideal.

The specular abjection of Madame Necker's Calvinist, maternal body transformed the salon stage. In complicating the sociable mirror, Suzanne Necker was able to claim the specularity of her sick body, and, from there, to reflect the moral sickness of French society as a whole. Appropriating the salon for the performance of excess within the contours of the mimetic masquerade allowed her to both perform the roles laid out for her and, at the same time, resist and refuse them. Thus Madame Necker rendered both her own body–and the elite sociable body–abject, forcing a confrontation of critical self-reflection. These are the insights developed and analyzed in the chapters that follow.

The first chapter argues for an understanding of the salon as an inherently performative space and identifies sociable propriety in terms of language, dress, tone of voice, and physical presence. It also introduces the idea of stigma by examining Suzanne Necker's contradictory relationship with Parisian aristocratic behaviors. On

the one hand, Parisian sociable practices were seductive, introducing her to a world of individuals whose interests and beliefs fuelled her personal literary ambitions and desires. On the other hand, however, she perceived these behaviors as inherently dangerous, and actively cultivated her outsider status as a way of maintaining her distinctly different cultural and religious identity.

In the second chapter, I examine Suzanne Necker's religious background and beliefs in detail. In particular, this chapter lays out the fundamental tenets of Calvinist belief and introduces the idea of religious abjection. Finally, it explores concepts which are central to the dissertation as a whole: display, exile, longing, and communion, all of which emanated from the inherently troubled nature of the divided Calvinist body.

Chapter 3 looks at Suzanne Necker's practical application of her religious beliefs by examining the ways in which Calvinist exile manifested itself in the form of the abject maternal body. I suggest that Madame Necker's filial longing, a futile quest for virtue inextricably linked both with the death of her mother and with her own religious desire, and conceived within the parameters of Calvinist moral failure, lies at the heart of her subsequent salon-based maternal practice. The salon, consciously claimed as a stage for the double performance of maternal duty and religious devotion, enabled a corporeal enactment of her intense psychic and moral struggles.

In Chapter 4, I examine the nature and purpose of Madame Necker's various nervous illnesses and argue that these illnesses constituted a corporeal manifestation of Suzanne Necker's psychic malaise. In other words, I contend that

Madame Necker's extended and largely indefinable physical illnesses were the result of extreme moral alienation and isolation. In this sense, her nervous ailments can be seen as evidence of her experience of exile: both the externally-imposed exile of physical dislocation brought about by the deaths of her parents, and her self-imposed moral exile, the result of her failure to fulfill her filial duty towards her mother's memory.

Finally, Chapter 5 examines the ritualistic nature of Suzanne Necker's dying, death, and burial and posits the conservation of her frail human machine (through the process of embalming) as symbolic of humanity's innate moral weakness and spiritual failure. In the process, Madame Necker's body, marked by suffering and physical incapacity, becomes the mark, or stigma, of human moral failure, and the embodiment of Calvinist culpability.

Chapter 1:
"Elle n'aura jamais l'art de plaire": Suzanne Curchod Necker and the Practice of Elite Sociability

> *Mme Necker n'avoit aucun des agréments d'une jeune Françoise. Dans ses manières, dans son langage, ce n'était ni l'air ni le ton d'une femme élevée à l'école des arts, formée à l'école du monde. Sans goût dans sa parure, sans aisance dans son maintien, sans attrait dans sa politesse, son esprit comme sa contenance, était trop ajusté pour avoir de la grâce.*[73]
>
> *Ici, je suis contrainte à cacher les mouvemens les plus naturels, pour éviter le reproche de la pédanterie; je fais continuellement à mon Coeur et à ses émotions une sorte de violence; et au moment où je suis en liberté, je trouve qu'il a perdu son élasticité accoutumée.*[74]

Buried in the memoirs of the Scottish lawyer, Archibald Alison (1792-1867), is a touching scene. In it, a young girl, her hair falling in ringlets around her shoulders, enters the family drawing room to say good night. In the presence of her parents' closest friends and colleagues, she kneels down at her mother's feet to pray, presenting a moving picture of filial devotion and religious piety. The scene itself, set in Paris sometime during the 1770s, is wholly unremarkable, save for the social and

---

[73] Jean-François Marmontel, "Mémoires," in *Oeuvres complètes*, 3 vols. (Paris: Librairie des bibliophiles, 1891), 1:318.

[74] Curchod Necker, *Mélanges*, 1:151-2.

political status of the characters involved. The young girl is Germaine Necker, daughter of Suzanne Curchod Necker and her husband, the Genevan banker-cum-French finance minister, Jacques Necker.[75]

Alison, here recounting a story apparently oft told by his mother, Dorothea Gregory, does not appear to note anything curious about it. Instead, he uses it as a way of marking social allegiances and of laying claim to his family's authority and presence within the bastions of the European elite. At first glance, Archibald's reading is correct. The scene, in which a daughter shared her prayers with her mother, was a common one, doubtless replayed in many homes. Mothers were seen as natural teachers and moral guides who carried full responsibility for their daughters' spiritual development. Educating girls in the teachings of the saints and the practices of the church, Catholic mothers inculcated their daughters into lives of piety and religious devotion practiced in the quiet isolation of the domestic sphere.[76]

Looking more closely, however, it appears far less predictable. While such an image of domestic felicity was conventional–indeed, approved–its display within the contours of a sociable sphere was not. Alison's image of touching maternal and religious devotion does not at all accord with the function of the Parisian salon, the regular weekly gatherings peopled by members of the French social, cultural, and philosophical elite. Not only was the salon a theatrical space–a site of display

---

[75] Sir Archibald Alison, *Some account of my life and writings: an autobiography*, ed. Lady Alison, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: W. Blackwood and Sons, 1883), 1:6 n.1, http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/MOML?af=RN&ae=F101310611&srchtp=a&ste=14 (accessed May 24, 2007).

[76] Mademoiselle de Lespinassy, *Essai sur l'éducation des demoiselles* (Paris: Hochereau 1764), 47. For more insight into the education of girls, see Paule Constant, *Un monde à l'usage des demoiselles* (Paris, France: Gallimard, 1987); Martine Sonnet, *L'Education des filles au temps des Lumières* (Paris, France: Le Cerf, 1987).

governed by intricate rules and coded behaviours–but it was also an inherently secular space, in which opposition to the church and its practices was much more common than allegiance to its tenets. It was hardly the site for the display of domestic or maternal virtue.

Alison's recollections take on an entirely different cast from this perspective. No longer evocative of cultural conformity in the realm of female moral education, they function instead as evidence of social and cultural discord in that they recall an instance of sociable alterity; that is to say, they illuminate domestic practices at odds with the acceptable conventions of the Parisian salon.[77] In the process, the seemingly innocent tableau, relegated to a minor footnote in Alison's two-volume work, highlights the fact that Suzanne Necker and her family were outsiders, perpetually stigmatized by their nationality, moral values, religious beliefs, and social class.

Suzanne Necker's social non-conformity has conventionally been read as failure. In the words of Catherine Dubeau, Madame Necker, as Swiss, Calvinist, and *bourgeoise*, "cumulera les images et épithètes désobligeantes, assurant une meilleure postérité à ses maladresses qu'à ses succès."[78] In this chapter I posit an alternative interpretation by suggesting that it is precisely in the dissonant encounter between apparent social failure in the drawing room and ostensible virtuous success as mother and wife that we might more productively read the contradictions that marked Madame Necker's life. By examining her conflicted relationship with sociable

---

[77] For more on Madame Necker's subversion of the ethos of the Parisian salon, see the commentary of Madelyn Gutwirth, who considers this a "daring" act. See Madelyn Gutwirth, "Suzanne Necker's Legacy: Breastfeeding as Metonym in Germaine de Staël's Delphine," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 18.2 (2004): 17-40.

[78] Catherine Dubeau, "L'Épreuve du salon ou le monde comme performance dans les *Mélanges* et les *Nouveaux Mélanges* de Suzanne Necker," *Cahiers staëliens* 57 (2006): 208.

practices through the lens of her understandings of duty and responsibility, I will argue that social failure might be more fruitfully reconceived from the perspective of resistance. From this vantage point, Madame Necker's curious sociable practices were not indicative of her inability to conform, but rather of her unwillingness to play the role assigned to her as a woman of means in elite French society. Madame Necker's lack of conformity emerges as a conscious act of self-stigmatization–or marking–and is ultimately symptomatic of a far deeper malaise.[79]

Such an analysis complicates conventional understandings of Madame Necker's life, but also provides unexpected insight. Her predominantly domestic sociability was founded upon principles of duty and religious obligation.[80] By contrast, prevailing ideals of French aristocratic sociable behaviour demanded allegiance to a wide array of coded courtly behaviours and practices.[81] The troubled encounter between the two approaches provides a revealing look into the relationships between religion, filial duty, maternal responsibility, and corporeal suffering as they played

---

[79] I draw here on the work of Colette Guillaumin, who, in "Race and Nature: The System of Marks," understands social relations through the interplay of "signs and marks" which identify individuals as members of particular social or cultural groups (Guillaumin, "Race and Nature," in *French Feminism Reader*, ed. Kelly Oliver [Lanham, USA: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000], 88). However, I am equally indebted to the more fluid approach offered by theorists such as Hélène Cixous, who argue for the promise and potential of the mark itself (see Hélène Cixous, *Stigmata*, trans. Eric Prenowitz et al [London and New York: Routledge, 1998]).

[80] By domestic sociability, I refer to the encounter between the values and ideals more common in the private sphere; in other words, those related to women's socially accepted roles as mothers, moral guides, and teachers.

[81] In *The accomplish'd Woman*, a treatise on gendered aristocratic sociability, Jacques DuBosc distinguishes quite clearly between domestic and aristocratic forms of sociable practice, writing: "It must not be imagin'd therefore that by an ACCOMPLISH'D WOMAN, whose picture we are here drawing, we mean the mother of a family, who knows how to command her servants, and dress her children. Tho' we blame not this, yet music, history, philosophy, and other the like exercises are more apposite to our purpose, than those of good huswifery" (Jacques Du Bosc, *The accomplish'd woman. Written in French by M. Du Boscq*, 2 vols. [London: J. Watts, 1753; Eighteenth-Century Collections Online] http://galenet.galegroup.com.proxy.lib.sfu.ca/servlet/ECCO, 1:118).

themselves out in Necker's life and through her body.[82] By positing sociable discord as evidence of deeper undercurrents of religious isolation and cultural dislocation, this chapter sets the stage for the more detailed study that follows. In so doing, it replicates the very performativity that defined not only the space of the salon, but also, and more importantly, the eighteenth-century identity itself.

In the sections that follow, I outline the nature and scope of Madame Necker's social experiences in the French capital and situate her behaviours in the context of elite eighteenth-century sociable ideals and practices. More specifically, I argue for a corporeal understanding of elite sociability, suggesting a species of physical marking that served to identify proper and improper social bodies. Of particular interest is the slippage between Madame Necker's desire to assimilate into the Parisian intellectual and cultural sphere and her concomitant need to separate herself from its temptations. My analysis depends on a detailed discussion of eighteenth-century conduct books, Madame Necker's posthumously published personal writings, and her correspondence with two Swiss friends. This chapter ultimately suggests points of tension between elite understandings of such concepts as *politesse*, *bienséance*, and *devoir*, and Madame Necker's own interpretations.

Setting the Stage

Suzanne Curchod was twenty-seven years old when she arrived in Paris as the guest of Madame de Vermenoux, a wealthy French widow who introduced her to elite Parisian society. Thrust into the limelight almost from the moment of her arrival, she

[82] "Les devoirs, les convenances du grand monde, une vigilance perpétuelle sur soi et autour de soi, une sensibilité qui se contraignait et se refoulait souvent en silence et avec douleur, tout contribua à user Mme Necker avant l'âge"(Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve, *Causeries du lundi*, 15 vols. [Paris: Garnier frères, 1851-62], 4:194-95).

found herself ill prepared for success in the French capital. Life in the aristocratic milieu was expensive and involved social performances for which she was poorly equipped.[83] Mademoiselle Curchod possessed none of the effortless, spontaneous, and suggestive *galanterie* which accompanied elite social exchanges.[84]

Curchod's 1764 marriage to Jacques Necker positioned her even more directly within the public eye. No longer a salon guest in the homes of others, she was now mistress of her own home and soon became hostess of her own sociable circle. Keenly aware of her limitations, Madame Necker felt significant pressure in this environment. As she observed in a letter 1766 letter:

> Imaginez-vous que depuis deux ans je suis alternativement ménagère et femme du monde, que j'étois si ignorante sur le premier de ces objets qu'il a exercé toutes mes facultés, et si gauche sur le second qu'il a captivé toute mon attention, si vous joignez à cela un attachement et des devoirs nouveaux, vous verrez que je n'ai pu sauver que mon coeur du naufrage de mes idées.[85]

---

[83] See, for example, a letter to Henriette Réverdil, dated 15 juillet 1766, in which she wrote that her husband had expensive tastes, in particular, regarding her dress "sur laquelle il me tirannise" (Suzanne Curchod Necker, Letter to Henriette Réverdil, 15 juillet 1766, ms.suppl.717, BGE). The financial realities of upper-class life can be discerned in Audiger, *La maison reglée, et l'art de diriger la maison d'un grand seigneur & autres, tant à la ville qu'à la campagne & le devoir de tous les officiers, & autres domestiques en general*, 3rd ed. (Amsterdam: Paul Marret, 1700; Thomson Gale) http://galenet.galegroup.com.proxy.lib.sfu.ca/servlet/MOME?af=RN&ae=U100391327&srchtp=a&ste=14, which details the number of staff and expected expenditures of an aristocratic household.

[84] Eighteenth-century dictionaries associate the idea of *galanterie* with the duties and obligations which a man owed to a woman. *Galanterie* appears to be located in the undefined space between sociability and seduction, and is thus alternately desirable and dangerous (See, for example: "Galanterie," *Dictionnaire de l'Académie françoise* [1762], 1:798). This approach is evident in some of the conduct books of the period. Relying on *galanterie* as a compositional device, these books offer suggestive and seductive conversations between would-be lovers in order to more clearly elucidate the practices of elite sociability.

[85] See Suzanne Curchod Necker, Letter to Etienette Clavel de Brenles, Paris 11 juin 1766, IS1915/xxx/h/1, BCUL; also in Golowkin, *Lettres diverses*, 296. The "devoirs nouveaux" to which she refers are the duties and responsibilities of new motherhood: her daughter, Anne-Louise-Germaine, was born on 22 April 1766.

Her new role was challenging and she frequently felt out of her depth.[86] Nevertheless, she made concerted efforts to fit in by paying careful attention to Parisian social practices.

Central to her efforts was the establishment of a salon. When Madame Necker officially opened her doors to the French cultural elite in 1765, the Parisian salon schedule was already quite full: Monday and Wednesday were dedicated to Madame Geoffrin; Tuesday to Helvétius; Thursday and Sunday to the Baron d'Holbach; and Saturday to Madame du Deffand. Mademoiselle de Lespinasse welcomed company every evening. But Madame Necker, drawing on her experiences in Lausanne, had prepared carefully for her endeavour. Assembling a group of close friends–among them Marmontel, Morellet and Thomas–to act as advisors, and seeking out the sage counsel of her mentor, Madame Geoffrin, she settled on a Friday afternoon gathering and began developing the exclusive guest list that would be necessary to her salon's development.

On the surface, Madame Necker's salon was an unqualified success. In addition to cultivating an international membership which included Enlightenment luminaries such as Grimm, Diderot, Suard, Thomas, Marmontel, and Morellet, and international guests including Benjamin Franklin,[87] Edward Gibbon, and Ferdinando

---

[86] . As she observed in a letter to Henriette Réverdil, "Je n'ai pas un moment à moi; les détails de ma maison sont énormes pour une tête inepte comme la mienne et si je ny mettois le plus grand ordre nous serions ruinez" (Curchod Necker, Letter to Henriette Réverdil, 1766, ms.suppl. 717, BGE).

[87] Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790), the famous American politician, thinker, and writer, acted as Ambassador to France between 1776 and 1785.

Galiani,[88] her salon was also the site of some important cultural happenings, among them the initiation of a subscription project to erect a statue in memory of Voltaire,[89] and the first reading of Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie* in 1787.

While the Necker salon appeared successful, the impressions of her contemporaries offer a decidedly different picture. Madame Necker was solicitous and attentive, but her salon lacked the *élan* of those of her contemporaries. Necker's guests commented on her pedantry, overt religious practice, and bourgeois social habits, and found her stiff formality intimidating.[90] Horace Walpole was singularly unimpressed: "I am not so transported with N**** cock and hen. They are a tabor and pipe that I do not understand. He mouths and she squawks, and neither articulates."[91] Jean-François Marmontel, one of the founding members of Madame Necker's Friday salon, was similarly critical in his assessment of her social skills: "Mme Necker n'avait aucun des agréments d'une jeune Françoise," he observed.[92] She had little taste in fashion, little spontaneity in her carriage, and little social appeal. In short, Madame Necker lacked the requisite social graces to succeed in polite society.

---

[88] Ferdinando Galiani (1728-1787) was an Italian economist appointed to the Neapolitan embassy in France. He maintained a close friendship with Madame d'Epinay – as evidenced by his extensive and often humorous correspondence with her – but also visited Madame Necker's salon.

[89] Friedrich Melchior Grimm records the circumstances leading to this project in his *Correspondance littéraire*, 9:14-17.

[90] "On n'ose parler. Mme Necker intimide les plus intrépides....On dirait que [Madame Necker] s'est imposé un grand rôle dont elle ne sort jamais; elle parle de vertu, de décence, de sentiment, non par un effusion de son propre coeur, mais par les idées qu'elle s'est formé de ce qui doit être; et je crois que son caractère à elle est parfaitement inconnu, et qu'elle n'a jamais eu... un moment d'abandon..." (Albertine Adrienne Necker de Saussure, reporting in 1787, quoted in Causse, *Necker de Saussure*, 1:64).

[91] Horace Walpole, Letter to H.S. Conway, "Paris, Sept. 8, 1775," in Horace Walpole, *Correspondence of Horace Walpole*, 3 vols. (London, UK: Henry Colburn, 1837), 3:130.

[92] Jean-François Marmontel, "Mémoires," 1:318.

The most vehement criticism of all came from Henriette Louise de Waldner de Freundstein, the Baronness d'Oberkirch, who observed that:

> M. Necker ne me plut point....Madame Necker est bien pis encore. En dépit des grandes positions qu'elle a occupées, c'est une institutrice, et rien de plus. Elle est pédante et prétentieuse au-delà de tout....Elle est belle, et elle n'est point agréable; elle est bienfaisante, et elle n'est point aimée; son corps, son esprit, son Coeur, manquent de grâce. Dieu, avant de la créer, la trempa en dedans et en dehors dans un baquet d'empois. Elle n'aura jamais l'art de plaire.[93]

Even more disturbing to Oberkirch, however, was the relationship between Madame Necker and her husband, Jacques. As she complained: "Ils ne s'ennuyèrent point; mais ils ennuyèrent les autres et se mirent à s'adorer, à se complimenter, à s'encenser sans cesse."[94] Oberkirch, an Alsace-born aristocrat now known primarily as a result of her posthumously published memoirs, encapsulated the essence of Madame Necker's crime: she was, for lack of better word, a pretender, whose social airs and affectations threatened the internal cohesion of the aristocratic class.[95]

To a certain extent, the same could be said of Madame Necker's famous colleague, the great Marie-Thérèse Rodet Geoffrin, who, as the almost illiterate child bride of a wealthy manufacturer hardly qualified as a proper member of the French elite. The difference, in terms of their reception by their guests, lay in their respective approaches to their *métier*. Geoffrin's success emerged from the fact that she never made herself out to be more than she was: direct, forthright, overtly *bourgeoise,* she

---

[93] Henriette-Louise de Waldner de Freundstein, Baronne d'Oberkirch, *Mémoires de la Baronne d'Oberkirch*, 2 vols. (Paris: Charpentier, 1869), 1:253-54.

[94] Oberkirch, *Mémoires*, 1:254.

[95] A short entry in Bachaumont's *Mémoires secrets* confirms this impression. Stressing her simple beginnings as the daughter of a village minister, her erudition, and her background as a governess, the author plainly suggested that Necker could never escape her background. Rather, her sociable endeavours were indelibly marked by her social, religious and cultural alterity (Bachaumont, *Mémoires secrets*, 16:100)..

acted her part well. In other words, Geoffrin knew her place in the world and deferred to it. Suzanne Necker, however, marked by cultural, social, and religious stigma, refused to abide by the rules of the game, a factor which had a strong impact in terms of how she was received by her contemporaries

In part, the criticisms levelled against Suzanne can be attributed to the xenophobic response of a self-congratulatory French elite accustomed to acknowledging its superiority in matters of social skill.[96] "Paris," wrote Pierre Ortigue de Vaumorière:

> is not only the Capital of a flourishing Monarchy, but is even respected as the predominant City of all *Europe*. People come here from all parts some to polish themselves, others to get Employments, others to see the finest Court in the World, and the greatest King on Earth.[97]

The fabled French art of sociability implied a strict adherence to a set of written and unwritten rules of conduct and propriety to which foreigners could never hope to aspire. Eminently desirable and deeply seductive, its inner workings were apparently wholly unattainable by the likes of Suzanne Curchod Necker.

Madame Necker's biographers have generally dismissed such criticisms. While they acknowledge her social maladroitness, they contend that her memory should be founded upon "son amitié vive pour tous les hommes distingués, sa

---

[96] This same xenophobia, suggests Madelyn Gutwirth, also lies at the heart of the French nation's vitriolic attacks on Marie Antoinette. See Gutwirth, *The Twilight of the Goddesses, Women and Representation in the French Revolutionary Era,* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, USA: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 184.

[97] Pierre Ortigue de Vaumorière, *The art of pleasing in conversation: in French and English. Written by the* famous Cardinal Richelieu (London: J. Darby, 1722; Eighteenth-Century Collections Online) http://galenet.galegroup.com.proxy.lib.sfu.ca/servlet/ECCO, 5.

charité, sa bonté, son humanité, qui la firent nommer la mère des pauvres,"[98] rather than on the detailing of minor faults observed, catalogued, and disseminated by less-worthy contemporaries.[99] Nineteenth-century biographical readings are almost unanimous in their praise of Suzanne Necker's domestic virtues, in particular, what they perceive as her "culte de son époux."[100] Sainte- Beuve, while acknowledging her social missteps, also placed the spotlight on her remarkable virtue. Lairtullier, on the other hand, makes some mention of Suzanne Necker's lack of naturalness, but nevertheless paints her as a successful social ornament, thus emphasizing the moral goodness that led her to work towards charitable reform and the conjugal devotion that characterized her marriage.[101] Such an approach, which evokes the image of a woman of laudatory and seemingly infinite domestic virtue,[102] is nonetheless a selective appraisal which altogether minimizes the concerns and perspectives of many of her contemporaries.

This is not to suggest that Suzanne Necker was wholly reviled by her contemporaries. On the contrary, the testimonials of some of her colleagues suggest

---

[98] "Necker (Madame)," in A.V. Varnault et al, *Biographie Nouvelle des Contemporains, ou Dictionnaire historique et raisonné de tous les hommes qui, depuis la Révolution française, ont acquis de la célébrité par leurs actions, leurs écrits, leurs erreurs our leurs crimes, soit en France, soit dans les pays étrangers*, 20 vols. (Paris: Librairie historique, 1820-1825), 15:31.

[99] Trophime-Gérard, marquis de Lally-Tollendal, noted that while Madame Necker was a woman "qui savait tout par les livres et peu de choses par les hommes," she was nonetheless a virtuous woman who made a public career out of her charitable endeavours ("Necker [Susanne Curchod de Nasse]," in *Biographie Universelle*, ed. Louis-Gabriel Michaud, 45 vols. [Paris: Madame C. Desplaces; Leipzig: Librairie de F.A. Brockhaus, 1843-18–], 30:274.

[100] Sainte-Beuve, *Causeries du lundi*, 4:195.

[101] Lairtullier, *Les femmes célèbres de 1789 à 1795, et leur excellence dans la révolution*, 2 vols. (Paris: Chez France, à la librairie politique, 1840), 1:111, 1:107, 1:114.

[102] "If her contemporaries, justly, perhaps, found her too cold and formal; yet she shines, at least in that dark age, a noble example of women's virtues – devoted love, truth, and purity" ("Necker, Suzanne," in H.G. Adams, ed. *A Cyclopaedia of Female Biography consisting of sketches of all women who have been distinguished by great talents, strength of character, piety, benevolence, or moral virtue of any kind; forming a complete record of womanly excellence or ability* [London: Groombridge and Sons, 1857], 576).

that they found her approach a refreshing change from the prevailing social norms. The Marquise de La Ferté-Imbault, daughter of the famed *salonnière* Madame Geoffrin, for example, warned Suzanne Necker *away* from the very people who could guarantee her social success,[103] and expressed her satisfaction at Madame Necker's virtuous behaviour in the following passage:

> Mais comme votre conduite à été très bonne et très sage...et que...vous ne vous este pas attiré la moindre condamnation du public ni le plus petit ridicule, que de plus, madame, toute les fois que j'ai eu l'honneur de vous voir, vous m'aves marqué amitié, estime et confiance, en voilà bien suffisament pour avoir effacée en moi les mauvaise impressions que votre trop d'amour pour l'esprit dépouillé de raison et de vertus m'avoit donnée.[104]

Edward Gibbon, too, highlighted the positive attributes of Necker's heritage and background and encouraged her to remain true to her roots.[105] Nevertheless, outside of a small group of intimate colleagues and friends, Suzanne's sociable behaviours were seen as curious at best.

That the pious, religious, and conservative Madame Necker would associate herself with the irreverent *mondanité* of Parisian salon culture certainly seems contradictory. But there is more at play. Haussonville and Antoine Lilti, drawing on the commentary of Madame Necker's contemporaries, have asserted that her salon

---

[103] "La marechale, madame du Deffant, madame de Boufflers et madame Marchais (dans un genre subalterne) sont quatres femmes si dégriés par les moeurs, et les deux premières sont si dangereuses, qu'elles sont depuis plus de trente ans l'horreur des honnestes gens. Ensuitte votre liaison intime avec ce vilain abbé Morlai vous fit tant de tors dans le temps de l'histoire de la Compagnie des Indes, ou M. votre mari joua un si grand rolle et l'abbé un si vilain, que si nous n'avions pas eu, madame, des amis communs qui vous justifiere comme ils purent, j'aurois pri aussi mauvaise opinion de votre ame que de votre raison" (Quoted in Haussonville, *Salon*, 1:262).

[104] Quoted in Haussonville, *Salon*, 1:262.

[105] "Je sai que le sejour de Paris, en faisant eclater sur un plus grand Theatre votre gout et vos talens, n'a point étouffè votre franchise Helvétique" (Edward Gibbon, Letter to Suzanne Curchod Necker, "à Londres 26 nov 1776," in Edward Gibbon, *Letters*, ed. J.E.Norton, 3 vols. [London: Cassell, 1956], 2:126).

was expressly designed as a vehicle to support the political aspirations of her husband.[106] If this is the case, then Madame Necker's direction and management of the salon space and her careful cultivation of an impressive guest list can be seen as concrete evidence of her fulfilment of her conjugal duties, a reading which accords neatly with Madame Necker's conservative moral stance. While her salon may have failed to live up to Parisian standards of sociability, it adhered to her principles and beliefs, thus enabling her to manage her cultural assimilation into the largely secular environment of the French elite.

At the same time, Madame Necker was drawn to her new cultural environment and seduced by the intellectual pleasures it afforded. In many ways, the environment of the Parisian salon represented a natural extension of her first sociable successes in Lausanne and Geneva.[107] The Parisian salon offered her the opportunity to further cultivate her intellectual interests and develop her skills. From this perspective, her salon served as a medium for the fulfilment of her personal literary ambitions and intellectual desires.

Madame Necker appears to have had a deeply conflicted relationship with the literary sphere. On the one hand, she embraced writing as a form of expression and a conduit into the public gaze; on the other, she was fully aware that such ambition directly contradicted her duties as wife and mother and knew that her husband was

---

[106] Haussonville, *Salon*, 1:116-17; Lilti, *Monde des salons*, 369-377. See also the comments of Marmontel, who observed that for all her attentiveness towards her guests, it was still clear that they were only there for Jacques Necker's amusement: "Ce n'était point pour nous, ce n'était point pour elle qu'elle se donnait tous ces soins, c'était pour son mari" (Marmontel, "Mémoires," 1:319).

[107] Mademoiselle Curchod was a member of the *Société du printemps* and the hostess of the *Académie des Eaux de la Poudrière*. See Haussonville, *Salon*, 1:25-33.

not supportive of women writers.[108] This paradoxical positioning highlights Suzanne Necker's complex and complicated relationship with Paris and the French people. On the one hand, Paris was a city that offered significant potential for self-realization through encounters with intellectually brilliant *philosophes*, through opportunities to attend stage performances by some of the great actors and actresses of the day, and through the possibility of taking on powerful political roles. In letters to Swiss friends, Madame Necker recounted her adventures with obvious delight, revelling in the fact that she could consider so many of these enlightened individuals as close acquaintances.[109] In Paris, Madame Necker met, and became fast friends with, Jean-Baptiste-Antoine Suard, Antoine Léonard Thomas, and Madame Geoffrin. She visited the opera and the theatre[110] and witnessed the performances of the great

---

[108] For more on this, see her letters to her husband and to God, as quoted in Haussonville, *Salon*, 2:9-14; the commentary of Jacques Necker, as quoted in Béatrice d'Andlau, *La jeunesse de Madame de Staël (de 1766 à 1786)* (Paris and Geneva: Droz, 1970), 109-110, and the comments of Germaine de Staël in "Mon Journal," *Cahiers staëliens* 28 (1980): 55-79; and Danielle Johnson-Cousin, "Le théâtre de Necker. A propos d'inédits des Archives de Coppet," *Revue de la société d'histoire du théâtre* 32.3 (1980): 220-31. Jacques Necker's disapproval of his wife's literary ambitions was not necessarily well received on the public stage, as the comments of a group of anonymous women demonstrate: "Vous, Monsieur, qui jouissez de la confiance du Roi, et de celle de tous les hommes, vous ne laissez à votre modest Compagne, que le soin de visiter les Prisons, de fonder des Hôpitaux, et de soulager les malheureux" ("Lettres de ces dames à M. Necker," in *Les tracts féministes au XVIIIe siècle* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1986), 86). For an analysis of relationships between her biographical construction as a woman who did not write and the politics of divorce in France, see Sonja Boon, "Does a Dutiful Wife Write; or, Should Suzanne Get Divorced? Reflections on Suzanne Curchod Necker, Divorce, and the Construction of the Biographical Subject," *Lumen* XXVII (forthcoming).

[109] See, for example, her correspondence with Madame de Brenles, which is filled with her experiences and encounters with members of the Parisian intelligentsia (IS1915/xxx/h/1 and IS1915/xxx/h/3, BCUL; see also Golowkin, *Lettres diverses*, 232-424.

[110] "J'ai vu hier débuter un acteur qui paroît promettre une révolution sur notre théâtre," she wrote to Madame de Brenles, "c'est un jeu si simple et si neuf, tant de précision dans les tons, si peu d'élévation de voix, qu'il tranchoit avec tous ceux qui jouoient avec lui, le parterre n'a su s'il devoit rire ou applaudir..." (Curchod Necker, Letter to Etienette Clavel de Brenles, Paris, 7 juin 1765, IS1915/xxx/h/1, BCUL; see also Golowkin, *Lettres diverses*, 284.

Mademoiselle Clairon.[111] In her letters to Etienette Clavel de Brenles, she announced the publication of new books, offered short vignettes of her experiences, and wrote amusing portraits of the great men she encountered,[112] all the while keeping her intellectually-oriented friend abreast of the cultural happenings in the French capital.

On the other hand, despite offering many opportunities for social advancement and providing innumerable hours of entertainment, elite Parisian society and its social conventions remained foreign to Suzanne. Her efforts to fit in often came at the expense of her sense of self. "Depuis que je suis à Paris," she wrote to a friend:

> ...je n'ai pus me livrer à cet abandon de pensées et de sentiment qui me rend votre correspondance si précieuse. Ici je suis contrainte à cacher les mouvemens les plus naturels, pour éviter le reproche de pédanterie; je fais continuellement à mon coeur et à ses émotions une sorte de violence; et au moment où je suis en liberté, je trouve qu'il a perdu son élasticité accoutumée. Je ne puis m'empêcher de juger ce pays avec sévérité.[113]

Not only were the rules of sociable behaviour intricate and arbitrary, thus making them almost impossible for an outsider to discern, but they also conflicted with many of her own values and beliefs. "Ah! Madame, quelle différence des momens que je passois auprès de vous dont le souvenir me dédommage encore de la futilité de mes occupations actuelles," she sighed in a letter to Madame de Brenles, "Le seul

---

[111] Claire-Josephe Léris, Mademoiselle de Clairon (1723-1803), was one of the most famous French actresses of her time. She made her debut at the *Comédie-italienne* in 1736, and subsequently appeared in Rouen and at the *Opéra* in Paris. She achieved her greatest success, however, through her career with the *Comédie-française*.

[112] She portrayed David Hume as follows: "Quant à Mr. Hume, figurez-vous un colosse très-galant, dont les yeux ne sont rien moins que philosophes, avec une bonne physionomie bien épaisse et bien douce, un propos à l'avenant avec un air cependant à ne pas dire tout ce qu'il pense, air qui ne tient point à une franchise de caractère, à une bonhomie de société et qui enchante" (Curchod Necker, Letter to Etienette Clavel de Brenles, Paris, ce 23me, IS1915/xxx/h/1, BCUL; see also Golowkin, *Lettres diverses*, 253.

[113] Curchod Necker, *Mélanges*, 1:151

avantage de ce pays est de former le goût, mais c'est au dépens du génie; on tourne une phrase en mille manières, on compare l'idée par tous ses rapports....On disserte à perte de vue, et l'on finit par dire: 'Cela est de mauvais goût.'"[114]

For Suzanne Necker, Parisian mores and conventions were completely foreign, and also entirely superficial.[115] She suggested that if Madame de Brenles knew what it took to excel at the art of pleasing, she would be appalled.[116] This opinion did not change with the passage of time. If anything, her sense of alterity only increased over the years. Writing to Antoine-Léonard Thomas in 1785, for example, she observed that the elite social sphere had something of the fantastic to it; it was a dream which could not exist in reality: "Je ne puis bien vous rendre l'impression que me fait Paris; ce n'est plus qu'une illusion, qu'un monde imaginaire peuplé d'êtres fantastiques."[117] In the face of such a vision, Suzanne was forced to maintain her distance:

> Il y a vingt ans, si vous vous souvenez, que me trouvant, pour la première fois, au milieu des plus beaux esprits de l'Europe, j'entendis traiter de chimères toutes les idées sur lesquelles j'avois fait reposé mon bonheur, ainsi que l'explication des phénomènes de ce monde; je gardai chèrement mes opinions au milieu de ce torrent d'incrédulité.[118]

Madame Necker's letters suggest that her sense of alienation went even deeper: she found Paris not only foreign, but also dangerous. Her letters to Madame

---

[114] Curchod Necker, Letter to Etiennette Clavel de Brenles, Paris, 7 novembre 1765, IS1915/xxx/h/1, BCUL, IS1915; see also Golowkin, *Lettres diverses*, 264.

[115] Many of Antoine-Léonard Thomas' letters to Suzanne Necker expand on this theme. See, for example: Thomas, *Oeuvres complètes*, 6:264-66; 6:269-71; 6:301-302; 6:503.

[116] "Si vous voyiez de près tout ce qu'il faut pour plaire aux François, vous en seriez effrayée," she writes in 1765. See Curchod Necker, Letter to Etienette Clavel de Brenles, 1765, IS1915/xxx/h/1, BCUL, IS1915; see also Golowkin, *Lettres diverses*, 255.

[117] Curchod Necker, *Mélanges*, 3:212.

[118] Curchod Necker, *Mélanges*, 3:212-13.

de Brenles refer to the "tourbillon" and "cahos" of Paris.[119] The city's frenetic energy was destabilizing and she became increasingly agitated by the constant bombardment of new sights and sounds: "Mon âme sans cesse électrisée par de nouveaux objets et par de nouveaux goûts."[120] Within such an environment of constant, restless–and, in Suzanne's opinion, superficial–activity,[121] repose and rest were impossible to find.[122] To Madame Necker, Paris was a city out of balance, poised on the brink of ruin, and potentially unable to recover from its excesses. "Nous ressemblons à ces gourmands dont le palais blasé est dégouté de tous les alimens et ne peut cependant revenir à des mets simples et salutaires," she wrote in 1773, "la finesse du goût est prodigieusement perfectionnée tant pour le corps que pour l'esprit, et nous réalisons au moral et au physique l'histoire du Sybarite, que le pli d'une feuille de rose empêchoit de dormir."[123]

In response to this relentless clamour, Suzanne consciously chose and cultivated the position of the exiled outsider. Throughout her life, she referred to her French colleagues as "les Parisiens" or "les François,"[124] while marking herself as

---

[119] Curchod Necker, Letters to Etienette Clavel de Brenles, Paris, le 7 juin 1765, and Jacques Abram Elie Daniel Clavel de Brenles, Paris 17 Décembre 1767, IS1915/xxx/h/1, BCUL; see also Golowkin, *Lettres diverses,* 283, 335.

[120] Curchod Necker, Letter to Etienette Clavel de Brenles, Paris, le 28 juin 1768, IS1915/xxx/h/1, BCUL; see also Golowkin, *Lettres diverses*, 351.

[121] Suzanne comments, for example, on the women of Paris, "[qui] sont nécessairement et perpétuellement en bute à des desseins cachés" (Curchod Necker, Letter to Etienette Clavel de Brenles, Paris le 20 Janvier 1768, IS1915/xxx/h/1, BCUL; see also Golowkin, *Lettres diverses*, 342.)

[122] "[D]epuis six semaines que les frimats m'ont rappelée à Paris, les embarras du retour, les visites et les fêtes que le Roi de Danemarck a occasionnées, ne m'ont pas permis de respirer"(Curchod Necker, Letter to Etienette Clavel de Brenles, Paris, le 12 Décembre 1768, IS1915/xxx/h/1, BCUL; See also Golowkin, *Lettres diverses*, 356)

[123] Curchod Necker, Letter to Etienette Clavel de Brenles, Paris, 6 Avril 1773, IS1915/xxx/h/1, BCUL; see also Golowkin, *Lettres diverses*, 414.

[124] See, for example, letter to David Garrick, in which she states that "les beaux esprits François" had celebrated his departure from the theatre as a way of claiming French authority over the stage (in Garrick, *Private Correspondence*, 2:624).

indisputably Swiss. Reading national identity–and the idea of *la patrie*–in terms of sociability, she used broad gestures to stake her claim to alterity. Clearly delineating the cultural differences between the two nations, she remarked,"Ce qu'on appeloit franchise en Suisse, devenoit égoïsme à Paris; négligence des petites choses, étoit ici manque aux bienséances."[125] From this perspective, her correspondence with Swiss friends appears as a lifeline, a way of maintaining her connections to the morals, values, and practices of her youth, particularly during periods when the endless frenzy of Parisian social life threatened to overwhelm her.[126] Throughout her years in Paris, Necker continued to find solace in the past and experienced a gentle melancholy in the recollection of her youthful life in Switzerland.[127]

Madame Necker's letters suggest that she felt profoundly torn between the social duties related to her new role within the Parisian elite–duties which brought her into contact with an intellectual sphere whose ideas and discussions she cherished–and her moral and religious duties to the nation and identity of her childhood, duties which compelled her to maintain a position of alterity, even in the face of the myriad seductions of the French capital.

---

[125] Curchod Necker, Letter to Etienette Clavel de Brenles, Paris, 31 Août 1771, IS1915/xxx/h/1, BCUL; also in Golowkin, *Lettres diverses*, 402.

[126] "Je vis dans un pays, Madame, où l'on ne peut répondre que de son coeur; le temps est un bien que l'on met en commun dans la société comme tous les autres. Jusqu'à présent j'en ai été un peu plus avare, vous m'avez appris à faire un usage mille fois plus précieux, et quand il seroit possible que le tourbillon où je vis étourdit ma sensibilité, vos lettres charmantes me rappelleroient bientôt toutes les délices de l'amitié." See Curchod Necker, Letter to Etienette Clavel de Brenles, Paris le 12 Décembre 1768, IS1915/xxx/h/1, BCUL; see also Golowkin, *Lettres diverses*, 356.

[127] "Dans ce moment ma position est bien différente, j'étois pauvre alors, incertaine de mon sort; mais j'avois des accès de joie dont je ne suis plus susceptible et je cherche vainement dans les plus brillantes assemblées, quelques traces de la vive impression que j'éprouvai alors" (Curchod Necker, Letter to Etienette Clavel de Brenles, Paris, le 4 Septembre 1768, IS1915/xxx/h/1, BCUL; see also Golowkin, *Lettres diverses,* 354).

La nécessité de plaire

Eighteenth-century sociable ideals and practices were propagated through a wide array of conduct books and treatises, many of which had been originally published during the seventeenth century. That the ideas contained within retained their currency can be demonstrated by the existence of eighteenth-century English translations of some of the more significant works,[128] the continued publication of similar works right until the end of the century,[129] and the fact that dictionary definitions of the main concepts relevant to the art of elite sociability remained unchanged throughout the eighteenth century.[130] Madame Necker's *Mélanges* and *Nouveaux Mélanges,*[131] too, offer extensive–almost obsessive–reflections on the nature of polite society. Read as a whole, these materials offer a detailed look at the contours of the sociable body as it was understood during the French eighteenth century. They make it clear that four terms are central to understanding the nature of elite sociability during the *ancien régime*: *bienséance, politesse, honnêteté*, and *plaire*. Together, these elements lay the groundwork for the successful practice of elite sociability in polite society.

---

[128] Nicolas Faret's *L'Honneste homme, ou l'art de plaire à la cour*, for example, originally published in 1630, was reprinted numerous times during the subsequent century, and appeared in English translation as late as 1754 as *The art of pleasing at court being a translation (with some additions) of an old French book, entitled L'honneste-homme; ou, l'art de plaire à la cour. Par le Sieur Faret* (Birmingham: T. Aris, 1754).

[129] See, for example, François de La Rochefoucauld, *Élémens de politesse et de bienséance: suivi d'un manuel moral, ou de maximes pour se conduire sagement dans le monde*, 2nd ed. (Liège: Chez F.J. Desoer, 1781).

[130] Compare, for example, the entries for *honnêteté, bienséance, plaire*, and *politesse* in the 1694, 1762, and 1798-99 editions of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie françoise*.

[131] For a more detailed look at her private writings, see Goodman, "Le Spectateur intérieur," 91-100; and Soumoy-Thibert, "Les idées de Madame Necker," 357-68.

According to the *Encyclopédie*, *bienséance*–or agreeableness–encompassed both moral and practical concerns.[132] At a general level, it referred to an individual's ability to behave according to accepted social conventions and behaviours within any given social environment.[133] In this sense, *bienséance* was spatially oriented: any body or object that added to the balance and pleasing quality of the sociable environment could be said to adhere to its principles.[134] Within the larger matrix of social comportment, *bienséance*, a general characteristic of sociability, can be understood as a backdrop that set the stage for more detailed and complex social behaviours such as *politesse*.

Politesse was a form of *bienséance* that enabled individuals to please and show their respect for others.[135] Related to the idea of civility, it was directly linked to social class and manifest in both language and corporeal practices.[136] Through the practices of *politesse*, elite individuals added polish, refinement, beauty, and finesse to their social circle, thus reshaping the nature of the sociable sphere. Like *bienséance*, *politesse* encompassed physical and moral attributes; in other words, the sociable individual could also be understood as a sociable body: "[revêtu] de la douceur, de la modestie, & de la justice que l'esprit cherche, & dont la société a

---

[132] See Vaumorière, *Art of pleasing*, 10-11. This edition includes both French and English texts.

[133] Denis Diderot, "Bienséance," *Encyclopédie*, 2:245. The *Dictionnaire de l'Académie françoise*, 2 vols. (Paris: J.B. Coisnard, 1694) offers a similar interpretation, positioning *bienséance* as that which is considered as normal or conventional behaviour, as the accepted mode of operating within different social envrionments. This definition remains unchanged throughout all eighteenth-century editions of the *Dictionnaire*.

[134] Diderot, "Bienséance," 2:245.

[135] Louis de Jaucourt, "Civilité, politesse, affabilité," *Encyclopédie*, 3:497; Anonymous, "Politesse," *Encyclopédie*, 12:916.

[136] Jaucourt observes that while *politesse* and *civilité* are related, *politesse* is reserved for the upper classes – the so-called *gens de qualité* – and *civilité* for the lower classes. In addition to this, he argues that it cannot be taught, and if it is, it becomes an artifice (3:497). At the same time, however, the anonymous author of the article "Politesse," asserts that while it is a natural trait, it must nevertheless be cultivated through education and practice.

besoin pour être paisible & agréable."[137] The physical body, which Jaucourt defined as a mirror of the internal soul, was transformed, in such a way that it could more accurately reflect "l'homme au-dehors comme il devroit être intérieurement."[138] The act of polishing was, therefore, not just a social act, but also an intimate and reflective act in which the sociable body reflected not only the inherent harmony of the sociable environment as a whole, but also the internal beauty of the individual.

Sociable individuals, now more broadly conceived within the parameters of sociable bodies, had an obligation to fulfil the sociable needs of their colleagues. Indeed, the art of pleasing was the nucleus of sociable practice.[139] Comprising *bienséance* and *politesse*, its successful enactment was intrinsic to crafting the *honnête homme*,[140] the properly socialized individual who, in fulfilling the requirements of *bienséance* and *politesse* through the art of pleasing, was a model individual and a credit to his society. Paradis de Moncrif envisioned the art of pleasing as a tool for social cohesion and mutual understanding. Positioned midway between indifference and true friendship, it was a flexible gesture which enabled sociable individuals to acknowledge their own emotional needs for recognition and

---

[137] Anonymous, "Politesse," 12:916.

[138] Jaucourt, "Civilité, politesse, Affabilité," 3: 497. Such practices would have included dress, posture, gesture and comportment. See, for example, the ideas contained in Wendy Hilton's, *Dance of court & theater: the French noble style, 1690-1725*, ed. Caroline Gaynor (Princeton, USA: Princeton Book Co., 1981).

[139] "Le désir de plaire renferme donc le désir d'être aimé" (Paradis de Moncrif, *Essais*, 17).

[140] Definitions in various eighteenth-century editions of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie françoise* suggest that the meaning of the term *honnêteté* was in flux during this period. The term was well used within court circles during the seventeenth century and continues to appear in eighteenth-century editions of the *Dictionnaire*. While both 1762 and 1798 editions agree that *honnêteté* is associated with the qualities of chastity, prudence, and modesty, and link it with ideas of *bienséance* and *civilité*, the 1798 edition links *honnêteté* with republican values, adding: "l'honneur...la probité, [et] la vertu" (*Dictionnaire de l'Académie françoise*, 2 vols. [Paris: J.J. Smits, 1798-99], 1:693).

appreciation and to fulfil the very similar needs of those around them. As Paradis de Moncrif observed, "Le désir de plaire renferme donc le désir d'être aimé."[141]

In general, Madame Necker's thoughts followed the sociable parameters laid out in the conduct books. She noted that in order to be an ornament to polite society, the basic principles of moderation, humility, decorum, and subtlety needed to be observed. Social success, she argued, was founded on a supreme awareness of self. The successful *maîtresse de maison* paid careful attention at all times.[142] Intimately aware of the social status of each of her guests,[143] she was a good listener who ensured that every guest had an equal opportunity to speak, carefully but adroitly interrupted when necessary, and treated everyone with deference.[144]

Like the authors of the conduct books, Necker addressed the use of language and stressed the significance of non-verbal cues such as dress, demeanour, and posture. Offering a dictionary definition of *bienséance*, she observed that: "La propreté ne consiste pas seulement dans des vêtemens ou dans des meubles propres; mais elle se montre par le grand arrangement des choses qui nous

---

[141] Paradis de Moncrif, *Essais*, 17. See also his observation that: "Si le désir de plaire nous égare quelquefois, combien aussi nous offre-t'il de moyens d'être aimés...?" (43). Moncrif's characterization of the art of pleasing as a point of equilibrium between "l'indifférence" and "l'amitié" recalls Mademoiselle de Scudéry's famous *Carte du Tendre*, which charted the development of friendship and mutual obligation. For more information see Madeleine de Scudéry, *Clélie: histoire romaine* (Paris: Champion, 2001) and James S. Munro, *Mademoiselle de Scudéry and the Carte de tendre* (Durham, UK: University of Durham, 1986). It is worth noting that members of Mademoiselle Curchod's first sociable circle, the *Académie des Eaux de la Poudrière*, fashioned themselves after characters in Scudéry's novel. Suzanne Curchod, as the presiding hostess, was named Thémire (Haussonville, *Salon*, 1:28-29).

[142] Curchod Necker, *Nouveaux Mélanges*, 1:34.

[143] Curchod Necker, *Mélanges*, 1:279.

[144] "Il ne faut jamais marquer de trop grandes préférences en société: cette manière de classer les gens et de faire des distinctions flattueuses, déplait à tous ceux qui n'ent sont pas l'objet" (Curchod Necker, *Mélanges*, 1:296).

entourent. Cet ordre averti l'imagination que rien n'a été négligé."[145] In order to fit in, the properly sociable being needed to ensure that she followed fashionable trends. Large gestures, loud and shrill voices, sudden movements, excessive *reverences*, "tout cela est désagréable, de mauvais ton et de mauvais grâce," she counselled.[146] Madame Necker's writings describe a social environment of subtlety and moderation in which physical gestures were coded and catalogued, and in which one's intrinsic worth was not calculated on one's moral or intellectual character, but rather, determined on the basis of external markers.[147] Impressing upon the reader the power and importance of the proper sociable body, Necker's comments serve to further highlight the essentially performative nature of the salon.

Central to the conceptions of *politesse*, *bienséance*, *honnêteté,* and *plaire* was the idea of display: the sociable body was an eloquent body[148] upon or through which were enacted not only the behaviours intrinsic to social cohesion, but also the desires and seductions of the French elite.[149] Eighteenth-century sociability, inherently performative, relied on the metaphor of the mirror, a device whereby the

---

[145] Curchod Necker, *Mélanges*, 2:72.

[146] Curchod Necker, *Mélanges*, 2:82-83.

[147] See also, Curchod Necker, *Mélanges*, 1:311-12; 1:36; 1:313; and 1:315.

[148] Paul Goring, in his work, *The Rhetoric of Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), argues that conduct books, deeply influenced by acting guides and treatises, sought to construct an eloquent body in which the emotional states of the individual could be corporeally conceived and displayed.

[149] For more insight into the idea of the displayed body in elite social culture, see Domna C. Stanton, *The Aristocrat as Art: A Study of the Honnête Homme and the Dandy in Seventeenth and Nineteenth-Century French Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), particularly Chapter Three, "The Self-As-Art: A Poetic Text and Its System," 107-174.

sociable individual could be both observing and, at the same time, observed, a position memorably evoked by Jeremy Bentham's panopticon.[150]

The relationships between observer and observed, as read through the metaphor of the mirror, are clearly in evidence in seventeenth and eighteenth-century conduct books. René Bary, for example, in his 1662 work *L'Esprit de cour, ou les conversations galantes*, includes a flirtatious dialogue in which two would-be lovers, Théodate and Ariane, discuss the nature of the reflected self. On the one hand, Ariane extols the virtues of nature, drawing her inspiration from fountains and streams, "glaces mouvantes," which, she feels, accurately represent her imperfections.[151] Théodate, on the other hand, praises civic virtues, suggesting that Ariane can only reveal her true self through social reflection; in other words, by mirroring herself through the gaze of others. Mirrors, he argues, exist as spaces of projection, through which one is able to realize one's deepest passions. It is through the mirror that Ariane is able to discover and project her understanding of her own worthiness, and also, through which she receives the estimation of others: "Vous ne devez pas vous considérer parce que je vous estime, vous devez vous considérer parce que vous estes estimable....il est temps que vous scachiez par vos propres observations que vous meritez bien qu'on vous observe."[152]

---

[150] For more on Bentham's panopticon, see Jeremy Bentham, *Panopticum; or, The inspection-house*, 3 vols. (London: R. Baldwin, 1791), 3. Within a Foucauldian framework, the idea of the gaze takes on oppressive power as an instrument of institutional domination. See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, USA: Vintage Books, 1995).

[151] René de Bary, *L'esprit de cour, ou conversations galantes* (Paris: 1662), 29.

[152] Bary, *Esprit*, 30. This might be compared to Lacan's "mirror-stage", in which the mirror is posited as a threshold mediating between the "specular I and the social I" (Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience," in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan [London: Routledge, 2001], 6).

Bary's *conversation galante* demonstrates the relationship between sociability and display.[153] Functioning as both reflecting and reflective entity, the sociable body enacts the inherently reciprocal nature of social exchange. More importantly, the metaphor of the mirror highlights its necessity within the social framework: reflection can only be successful if every individual consents to participate. The refusal of the mirror fundamentally undermines the *art de plaire*.[154] The act of mirroring is therefore more than a useful metaphor, it is a social obligation required of all participants.[155] Mirroring enabled social perfection, a fact of which Suzanne Necker was well aware: "On disoit de Mme. De Lauzun: Elle s'est modelée sur le caractère qu'on lui a donné d'abord dans le monde, et c'est pour cela qu'elle est parfaite."[156]

Eyes play a powerful role in this process. As reflective surfaces, they glitter and shine. Mirroring the brilliance of the observed, they acknowledge the sociable individual's veneer of *politesse* and assess the individual's moral goodness.[157] At the same time, they are porous and function as points of entry into the heart: through the

---

[153] The *conversation galante* denoted a species of seductive conversation governed by the principles of *galanterie*, which the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie françoise* (1762), defined as "Agrément, politesse dans l'esprit & dans les manières" (1:798). *Galanterie* is also inherently sensual and sexual quality of such personal interactions and exchanges by noting that *galanterie* also refers to: "Un commerce amoureux & criminel. Cette femme a une galanterie avec un tel. *Elle a déjà eu plusieurs galanteries*" (1:798; italics original). Antoine Watteau's numerous *fêtes galantes,* painted in the early eighteenth century, draw on similar themes and ideas.

[154] Taken a step further, the refusal of the mirror can be interpreted as a very personal refusal of the individual who initiates the process of mirroring. If Ariane does not wish Théodate's eyes to reflect her brilliance, then this is because she has convinced herself that they are not proper for this purpose, or, more damningly, that they not worthy of the function: "Que si vous ne voulez pas que mes yeux representent votre personne, c'est que vous vous persuadez, ou qu'ils ne sont pas propres à cet usage, ou qu'ils ne sont pas dignes de cette fonction" (Bary, *Esprit*, 31).

[155] Ariane, however, points to one essential difference between rustic, or moving, mirrors, and social, or reflective, mirrors. She suggests that the natural reflection she experiences when looking into a stream is the true reflection because it has not been filtered through another individual's memories or cultural understandings. Within a sociable setting, Ariane is in danger of becoming "amoureuse de moi-mesme" and therefore wholly reliant on the mirrors for her self-awareness. (Bary, *Esprit*, 31)

[156] Curchod Necker, *Nouveaux Mélanges*, 1:78.

[157] Théodate insists that if his eyes are like fire, as Ariane insists, this is because Ariane is the source of their fire (Bary, *Esprit*, 31).

observation and acknowledgement of others, social individuals are able to acknowledge and take stock of themselves.[158] In this sense, the mirror enables a process of mutual recognition without which the elite individual, as a social entity, would cease to exist. In the early twentieth century, Maurice Merleau-Ponty would define this reciprocity as essential to his understanding of phenomenology. "To see is to enter a universe of beings which *display themselves*....In other words: to look at an object is to inhabit it, and from this habitation to grasp all things in terms of the aspect which they present to it," he wrote, "But in so far as I see those things too, they remain abodes open to my gaze, and, being potentially lodged in them, I already perceive from various angles the central object of my present vision. Thus every object is the mirror of all others."[159]

Madame Necker's correspondence with the renowned British actor, David Garrick, offers one instance of the practical application of the mirroring imperative. "Vous m'avez écrit une lettre délicieuse," Madame Necker wrote in 1776:

> vous faites passer à votre plume la flamme qui anime vos rôles, tout est pour vous les matériaux de la vie. je l'ai lue seule cette lettre, d'abord avec attendrissement, ensuite je l'ai rendue avec orgueil à toute ma société. Sans cesse je m'en vois entourée, on me dit, Contez-nous encore un peu de ce grand homme, Comment jouoit-il Hamlet? le Roi Lear? Sir John Brute? Je conte, et l'on pleure ou l'on rit....[160]

By using the letter as her mirror, she was not only able to present a self surrounded by the adulations of her colleagues–in other words, a self rendered more worthy as a

---

[158] Théodate claims that even if Ariane resists his gaze, "votre image s'est imprimée dans mon coeur, & ce qui a passé par mes yeux peut bien y faire quelque demeure"(Bary, *Esprit*, 32); see also Stanton, *Aristocrat as Art*, 122-23.

[159] Merleau-Ponty, *Basic Writings*, 81.

[160] See David Garrick, *The Private Correspondence of David Garrick with the most celebrated persons of his time*, ed. James Boaden. 2 vols. (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1832), 2:624.

result of her highly-desirable friendship with Garrick–but also to provide a space through which this glory could be reflected back onto Garrick himself.[161] Such a performance demonstrates her deepening awareness of the purpose and function of the sociable mirror. Each of Madame Necker's activities enhanced her personal social capital, and through them, she was able to cultivate her cachet in the public sphere. Her burgeoning social life can, therefore, be seen as intrinsic to her development as a highly visible woman in the public eye, and functioned as a platform upon which she constructed her Parisian identity.

Secrets of the Successful *Salonnière*

Women played a central role in the cultivation and dissemination of elite sociable practices.[162] As social ornaments, their perceived physical and moral beauty enhanced the *bienséance* of the sociable sphere and offered demonstrable proof of the promise of the sociable endeavour; it was through women that civilization was possible.[163] As teachers of virtue, women were the perfect foil for men.[164] Assumed to

---

[161] Garrick's response is equally telling. Upon acknowledging the receipt of her letter, he wrote: "Mr. Gibbon, our learned friend and excellent writer, happened to be with me when I received the bewitching letter; in the pride and grateful overflowings of my heart, I could not resist the temptations of showing it to him – he read – stared at me – was silent, then gave it to me, with these emphatical words emphatically spoken – *This is the very best letter that ever was written*" (Garrick, *Private Correspondence*, 2:625; italics original). There is an inherent theatricality in this discourse, which overtly acknowledges the performative nature of sociable discourse. The audience is not just quietly assumed, it is an overt participant in a process of identity creation.

[162] For another perspective on the idea of women as instruments of social cohesion, see Dena Goodman, "Policing Society: Women as Political Actors in the Enlightenment Discourse," in *Conceptualising Women in Enlightenment Thought/ Conceptualiser la femme dans la pensée des Lumières*, eds. Hans Erich Bödeker and Lieselotte Steinbrügge (Berlin, Germany: Berlin Verlag Arno Spitz, 2001), 129-141.

[163] Mr. M***, for example, suggests that women can be perceived as models of the sociable project; in other words, as physical manifestations of ideal sociability, writing: "Enfin il semble que la Divinité se soit pluë à rendre la Femme son ouvrage le plus beau & le plus parfait" (Mr. M*** *Discours sur les hommes; ou nouvelle apologie des femmes* [Paris, 1755]).

[164] "La femme a été créée pour charmer l'Homme, elle le charme, & la nature est contente" (Mr. M***, *Discours*, 26).

be naturally sensitive, emotional, modest, and delicate beings, they provided a balance for and counterpoint to men's greed, avarice, and ambition.[165] François de Grenaille, for example, suggested that women enabled the reflective and reciprocal function of the mirror, arguing in a very Platonic move that, "nous trouverons que sa face est le Miroir de son esprit, & que la Beauté mesme n'est que l'image de son corps."[166] Physical beauty was not only supposed to be a concrete manifestation of moral beauty, but also, through the metaphor of the mirror, a reflection of the beauty of the sociable project as a whole.

These ideals were manifest in the person of the *salonnière*, the hostess who initiated and managed the sociability of the salon. Most *salonnières* learned their art as protégées of senior salon women. Madame Geoffrin, for example, began her 'training' in the salon of Madame du Tencin. Geoffrin, in her turn, acted as a mentor for the next generation of salon women. Not only did she advise Suzanne Necker, but she also financially supported the endeavours of Julie de Lespinasse upon the latter's break with her aunt, Madame du Deffand. Closer to home, she raised her own daughter, Marie-Thérèse Geoffrin d'Estampes, Marquise de La Ferté-Imbault, in the salon.

Even as salon women developed their skills under the tutelage of successful mentors in a culture dedicated to the principles of the art of pleasing, these apprenticeships were not designed to develop carbon-copy replicas. Indeed, each *salonnière* was unique: just as Madame Necker was known for her moral rectitude

---

[165] Mr. M***, *Discours*, 10.

[166] François de Grenaille, *Les plaisirs des dames* (Paris: Gervais Clousier, 1641), 64. See also Jacques DuBosc, *Accomplish'd woman*, 1:309.

and her disavowal of irreligious talk,[167] Madame Deffand was known for her acerbic wit, [168] Geoffrin for her organizational skill,[169] and La Ferté-Imbault for her parodic approach.[170]

Of all the renowned salon women, it was Julie de Lespinasse who most successfully embodied the sociable ideal. Lespinasse was thirty-three years old when, with the financial help and political intervention of Geoffrin and other colleagues, she started her own salon. Her salon lineage was exemplary: not only had she served a lengthy apprenticeship at the side of her aunt, the formidable Marquise du Deffand, but she also received significant financial assistance and moral support from Madame Geoffrin, who invited her to attend her own salon. More importantly, she was able to poach many of Deffand's regulars. Lespinasse's salon, located in her apartment at the corner of the rue Belle-chasse and the rue St. Dominique in the Faubourg St. Germain, became a second home to such luminaries as Jean le Rond d'Alembert,[171] the noted economist and statesman, Anne Robert Jacques Turgot, and the thinker and mathematician, Marie Jean Antoine Nicolas de Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet.

Lespinasse's salon was extremely successful, a feat due in no small part to her skill. Her guests, a somewhat motley assemblage of persons drawn from a range

---

[167] "La conversation y était bonne, quoique un peu contrainte par la sévérité de Mme Necker, auprès de laquelle beaucoup de sujets ne pouvaient être touchés, et qui souffrait surtout de la liberté des opinions religieuses" (André Morellet, *Mémoires inédits de l'abbé Morellet*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. [Paris: Baudoin, 1822], 1:154).

[168] Craveri *Madame du Deffand*, 19; 32; 40; 63; 90.

[169] "Il y avait à Paris une marquise du Deffant, femme pleine d'esprit, d'humeur et de malice" (Marmontel, "Mémoires," 1:243).

[170] The Marquise de La Ferté-Imbault's 'salon,' known as the *Sublime ordre des Lanturelus*, was a farcical parody of her mother's salon. With its proclamations, edicts and other directives, it also played upon easily recognizable courtly behaviours.

[171] Jean le Rond d'Alembert (1717-1783), co-editor of the *Encyclopédie*, was a noted French mathematician.

of social classes, were nonetheless–through Lespinasse's mediation–ideally suited to work together. As Jean-François Marmontel observed:

> [Mademoiselle de Lespinasse] les avait pris ça et là dans le monde, mais si bien assortis que, lorsqu'ils étaient là, ils s'y trouvaient en harmonie comme les cordes d'un instrument monté par une habile main. En suivant la comparaison, je pourrais dire qu'elle jouait de cet instrument avec un art qui tenait de genie; elle semblait savoir quel son rendrait la corde qu'elle allait toucher; je veux dire que nos esprits et nos caractères lui étaient si bien connus que, pour les mettre en jeu, elle n'avait qu'un mot à dire. Nulle part la conversation n'était plus vive, ni plus brillante, ni mieux réglée que chez elle.[172]

Marmontel's description not only outlines Lespinasse's aptitude for social management, but also succeeds in encapsulating the nature and scope of the sociable endeavour. The evocation of harmony suggests the power of the group endeavour over the autonomy of the individual and stresses the idea of elite sociability as an instrument of social cohesion. At the same time, by promoting musical harmony, which can only result from the combination of two different notes, Marmontel recognized that difference was essential to the ultimate harmony of the whole. Most significant, however, is Marmontel's equation of the *salonnière* with both composer and performer. In so doing, he explicitly identified sociability as a performative project governed by the aesthetic inclinations of the *salonnière*, cultivated through the varied conversations–or harmony–of the guests, and developed and performed within the space of the salon.[173]

---

[172] Marmontel, "Mémoires," 1:242-43.

[173] While the distinction between composer and performer is clearly defined today, such was not the case in the eighteenth century, when the two roles overlapped significantly. A composition was not considered 'complete' without actual performance. In this model, both composer and performer can be seen as 'authors' of the work. The musical score functioned as a sort of mediating space between composer and performer, upon which both would inscribe their respective versions of the story.

Marmontel's analogy demonstrates that salon dialogue occurred on many levels. As the creator of the harmony, the *salonnière* was the author of the musical performance; in other words, she initiated the dialogue between the performer and the individual notes. First of all, the *salonnière* had to enter into an internal dialogue with herself in order to decide which notes to put into play.[174] Having reflected upon this, she then initiated a dialogue with the notes themselves, creating harmony–or sound–from a judicious blend of single notes. This is where her authorship, as performer and instigator of the dialogue, ended. The final dialogue could only occur between the harmony and the resonating space, or salon.

Each step in the process was integral to the whole. As a virtuoso, the *salonnière*, though not actively involved in the dialogue between harmony and space, necessarily responded to it. The relationship between the original harmony and its resonance affected all of the *salonnière*-as-musician's subsequent decisions; after all, she was as capable of creating discord as she was of creating harmony. Marmontel's metaphor provides crucial information about the reciprocal roles of the salon, *salonnière*, and guests, and outlines their respective functions, rights, and obligations. His homage to Lespinasse's skill as the orchestrator of salon conversation provides evidence of the formidable power and talent of the salon woman.

Even so, Lespinasse's skill was born from her self-denial: the success of her salon rested on her complete sublimation of her individuality–through the practices

---

[174] It may be relevant to note a play on words by Marmontel, who writes *"elle semblait savoir quel son rendrait* ***la corde*** *qu'elle allait toucher"* but could equally well have written *"elle semblait savoir quel son rendrait* ***l'accord*** *qu'elle allait toucher."*

of elite sociability–to the good of the social unit as a whole.[175] As Paradis de Moncrif observed, the practice of elite sociability was conceived as a way of managing social relations; it was a force specifically designed to foster social cohesion, and a method whereby aristocrats could define themselves and demarcate the boundaries of their existence.[176] From this perspective, the *art de plaire* can be understood as the art of exclusion. This, certainly, is the idea which lies behind the criticisms of Suzanne Necker's social skills. Madame Necker did not fit in, commentators suggested, because she was of the wrong class and religion. Because of this, they asserted that Necker would never succeed at the art of pleasing and, therefore, could never be accepted as a full member of polite society.

However, the conduct books also tell a different story, arguing that the desired social cohesion was a result of *politesse*; in other words, they suggest the necessity of acknowledging–at least superficially–the inherent worthiness of every individual, regardless of class or rank.[177] Jacques Delille, for example, a member of Geoffrin's salon, waxed poetic about the salon environment, describing it as:

---

[175] For more on this, see Goodman, "Julie de Lespinasse," 3-10 and Pascal, "Muse," 243-65.

[176] For a more theoretical understanding of this idea, see Pierre Bourdieu's discussions of social and cultural capital as elaborated in: *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power*, trans. Lauretta C. Clough (Oxford: Polity Press, 1996); Pierre Bourdieu, and Jean-Claude Passeron. *Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture*, trans. Richard Nice (London, UK and Newbury Park, USA: Sage in association with Theory, Culture & Society, Dept. of Administrative and Social Studies, Teesside Polytechnic, 1990); Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, UK and New York, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

[177] Under the entry "politesse" in *L'Homme de lettres et l'homme du monde*, the author writes,"La véritable politesse consiste à paroître persuadé que les autres sont tels qu'ils se montrent" (M. de ****, *L'Homme de lettres et l'homme du monde* [Orléans: Couret de Villeneuve le jeune, 1774], 114).

> La plus heureuse représentation de l'espèce humaine et de la perfection sociale. Là, chacun apporte son desir et ses moyens de plaire, sa sensibilité, son imagination, son expérience, le tout embelli par la politesse et contenu par la décence; là, se montre un instinct mutuel d'affections bienveillantes...là, sans règlement, sans contrainte, s'exerce une douce police, fondée sur le respect qu'inspirent les uns aux autres les hommes réunis, sur le besoin qu'ils on d'être bien ensemble.[178]

Such an approach is intimately tied to ideas of democracy and equality. As Suzanne Necker observed:

> On a regardé la politesse comme une servitude; et son origine au contraire se trouve dans les ménagemens de la force pour la foiblesse, pour la vieillesse, pour les femmes, pour les enfans, etc. La politesse est conforme à ce principe d'égalité dont on nous parle si souvent; elle est le rempart de ceux qui ne peuvent pas se défendre, et c'est même ce qui en fait l'éloge et le mérite.[179]

The non-verbal manifestations of the *art de plaire*, however, suggest that while diversity was tolerated, cohesion and homogeneity were valued. The sociable body was inextricably linked with the aristocratic body, a corporeal presence able to manifest virtue through the practice of courtly appearances and behaviours. The corporeal aspects of the sociable body: physical gestures, dress, comportment, and so forth, were a sort of "second language" which outsiders could never fully master.[180] Within this system, the socially inferior body, while still tolerated, was inherently less able to manifest sociable virtue. Such, in essence, was the nature of Suzanne Necker's sociable exile. As she concluded: "Personne n'a plus senti que

---

[178] Jacques Delille, in the preface to his work "La Conversation: Poème en trois chants" (Jacques Delille, *Oeuvres de J. Delille*, 2 vols. (Paris: Lefèvre, 1844), 2:195.

[179] Curchod Necker, *Nouveaux Mélanges*, 2:291.

[180] "Les expressions du visage, du geste, de la voix, sont un second langage, qui a son stile & qui marque, ainsi que fait le choix des mots, & la maniére de les prononcer, l'extraction plus ou moins relevée, ou du moins l'honnête ou la mauvaise éducation" (Paradis de Moncrif, *Essais*, 45).

moi, qu'il faut être né dans ce pays pour y réussir par les agrémens."[181] Suzanne's comments and concerns reflected the criticisms of her salon guests, and as such, indicate a species of social failure.

The Seductions of Paris: Refusing the Sociable Imperative

However, even as Madame Necker sought acceptance within the Parisian intellectual and social sphere, she was nevertheless deeply ambivalent about the mores and values of this environment and actively cultivated a position of alterity. Such a positioning appeared at once to confirm *and* threaten the social cohesion promised by the practices of elite sociability. This interplay between acquiescence and resistance must be taken a step further, and it is in taking this step that I situate my research as a whole. One of the intriguing aspects of this research has been the subtle interplay, interaction, and tension between differing lexicographical definitions of broader cultural and religious themes. Of particular interest are the slippages between French elite understandings of duty and those espoused by Madame Necker. These tensions not only exist in the texts defining elite sociability–in this case, the conduct books and Madame Necker's writings–but also, by leading to very different understandings of the art of pleasing, directly impacted social practices and behaviours.

According to the *Dictionnaire de l'Academie françoise* (1762), the word *devoir*, or duty, can be understood as that which one is obligated to do by law,

[181] Curchod Necker, Letter to Etienette Clavel de Brenles, 1775, IS1915/xxx/h/1, BCUL; also in Golowkin, *Lettres diverses*, 424. A similar comment appears in the second volume of her *Mélanges*, 2:91-92).

custom, *honnêteté*, or *bienséance*.[182] The individual, for example, could owe duty to her family, her church, her sovereign, or her nation. The specific duties in which one engaged functioned as external markers of social identity; in other words, they were specific to the community with which one identified oneself. As such, the realization of one's duties could be seen as integral to the individual's perceived social and cultural roles. The fulfilment of one's duties signified the individual's acceptance of the requirements of one's position, socially, legally, emotionally, spiritually, or otherwise. In this sense, the practice of one's duties could be said to operate on two levels: not only were duties externally imposed by the dictates of the social group of which one was a part, but they could also be consciously claimed in order to publicly identify oneself as a member of a particular group. Within aristocratic circles, the idea of duty was inextricably linked with the responsibilities that the individual owed to his or her social class; in other words, it was a sociable duty, in which the cultivation of the elite identity was paramount.

Suzanne Necker, however, had an entirely different relationship with the idea of duty. While she acknowledged the duties she owed to elite society, her *amour-propre* was directly linked to the practice of civil duties; in other words, to the responsibilities which she owed to society as a whole. This understanding of duty is laid out explicitly in her unpublished *Journal de la dépense de mon temps*. After observing that God had given her twenty-four hours a day, she outlined her main

[182] "DEVOIR signifie aussi, Être obligé à quelque chose par la Loi, par la Coutume, par l'honnêteté, ou par la bienséance" (*Dictionnaire de L'Académie française (1762)*, 1:529).

responsibilities, which included not only the expected duties towards family and friends, but also direct responsibilities towards the poor.[183]

Madame Necker's approach, which transformed social duty into civic duty through the vehicle of domestic maternal sociability as practiced within the salon, suggests a fundamental repositioning of the *art de plaire*. While the French elite, who quite literally nursed their way into propriety, understood the art of pleasing as a species of facile *galanterie*, Suzanne Necker perceived it as a way of giving meaning to her life. *L'Art de plaire* was much more than just the art of pleasing; it was the art of serving. To give, suggested Necker, was "une jouissance."[184] In order to live virtuously–and thus, to attain happiness–one had to give: of one's time, of one's wealth, and of one's self.[185] As Madame Necker observed, "Remplir mes devoirs, voilà donc ma première passion et mon premier soin."[186]

Necker's repositioning is extremely significant. Not only did it subvert the exclusionary nature of the aristocratic art of pleasing, but it also fused courtly French manners and elite sociability with her strongly Protestant upbringing, thus creating a model which was far more relevant to–and compatible with–her own conception of self. Such a reformulation did not necessarily need to be fraught with contradictions. In fact, as Necker observed:

---

[183] Haussonville, *Salon*, 2:5-6.
[184] Curchod Necker, *Mélanges*, 1:22.
[185] Soumoy-Thibert, "Idées," 363.
[186] Quoted in Andlau, *Jeunesse*, 42.

> Un des grands principes de l'usage du monde, c'est de paroître bien avec toutes les personnes qu'on rencontre, soit qu'on les aime, soit qu'on ne les aime pas; car si l'on y fait attention, il est possible de rapprocher toutes les maximes de la politesse, de préceptes de l'Evangile; les unes sont l'image et les autres la réalité.[187]

In this passage, Necker demonstrates that moral and social duties were not inimical to one another. This excerpt also provides confirmation of Madame Necker's attempts to reconcile what could otherwise be seen as disparate gestures of civic responsibility. From this perspective, Madame Necker emerges as a hyphenated cultural hybrid. Influenced as much by the conventions of her adopted Parisian society as by the morally rigorous foundations of her upbringing, she crafted a method of sociable conduct that maintained the form of French propriety while at the same time substantially manipulating its content in accordance with her own deeply held beliefs.

This tension between moral duty and the sociable imperative suggests that it might be necessary to reframe the comments and criticisms of her contemporaries. Could it be that the discomfiture and criticism of Suzanne's guests emerged not from an awareness of her limitations, but from a recognition of her resistance? Certainly, the Baronne d'Oberkirch's previously cited commentary seems overly critical, defensive even, as if to suggest that she felt insulted and disturbed by Suzanne's behaviour. Oberkirch suggests a species of wilful defiance on Suzanne Necker's part, ascribing to her actions both a conscious refusal to play the role assigned to her as a result of her birth and upbringing, and an equally audacious determination to

[187] Curchod Necker, *Mélanges*, 2:11.

infiltrate and infect the upper classes with what might more properly perceived as bourgeois social values.

Pamphlet literature of the period reveals yet another layer of complexity.[188] Madame Necker was pilloried in a number of pamphlets dating from the 1780s; that is, during the period of her husband's political controversies and her own increased visibility on the public stage as a result of her charitable endeavours. The pamphlets attacked her on the very grounds upon which she founded her identity–her virtue, and, implicitly, her religious belief–presenting instead a woman who would go to any lengths to protect her public image.[189] These libellous works presented their readers with the image of a scheming wife who sought further grandeur for herself and her husband through a variety of underhanded actions.

Among the most disturbing allegations to emerge as a result of these defamatory pamphlets was that Madame Necker had plotted their removal–and therefore, the silencing of her critics–through direct intervention: by descending into town *en travestie* and falsely gaining a bookseller's confidence.[190] This damning indictment suggests that Necker's behaviour destabilized social relations in a

---

[188] For more on popular eighteenth-century depictions of Madame Necker's social audacity, see Léonard Burnand, "L'image de Madame Necker dans les pamphlets." *Cahiers staëliens* 57 (2006): 237-54.

[189] See, for example: *Les deux conversations de Madame Necker, Femme du Directeur des Finances en France* (Genève: Cruchaut, 1781). The publisher and place of publication would suggest plays on Madame Necker's cultural, social, and religious background, thus further emphasizing her cultural alterity.

[190] "On assure que madame Necker a eu l'infamie de se traverstir, d'aller elle-même chez un de ces malheureux avec une recommendation, & qu'ayant gagné sa confiance, elle a fait paroître des alguazils & un exempt de polic qui l'accompagnoient, lesquels ont arrêté le trop crédule colporteur et saisi sa marchandise," in Bachaumont, *Mémoires secrets*, 15:188.

number of ways. The image of the disguised–and possibly cross-dressed–woman[191] not only undermined her performance of properly feminine virtue, but also subverted the masculine authority of the public sphere itself. Madame Necker, celebrated in her husband's infamous *Compte rendu* of 1781 as a paragon of feminine virtue and the epitome of felicitous domesticity,[192] was revealed to be nothing more than a social and cultural interloper, a woman of deception whose very presence threatened the harmonious coherence of the French social and political sphere. Furthermore, these works suggested that Madame Necker's moral stance was itself the result of her performance of *travestissement*: the staging of virtue was just that, a masquerade that masked her less-than-honourable true intentions.

The previously cited comments of Madame d'Oberkirch and the vitriolic criticisms of the pamphleteers are certainly worth considering. For if *l'art de plaire* was founded upon a necessary integration and sublimation of the self into the larger project of aristocratic identity as a whole, then Suzanne Necker's conscious resistance would have been understood as tantamount to betrayal. Madame Necker did not reflect back the requisite social identity; instead, she presented and performed an alternative identity informed by a wholly different set of values. In contrast to Julie de Lespinasse, for example, the supremely successful salon woman who sublimated her entire self to the cause of elite sociability, Suzanne Necker performed her autobiographical self by laying claim to her alterity, using elite salon sociability as a stage upon which to launch a counter-performance of domestic

---

[191] The *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, 4th Edition (1762) defines 'travestir' as the taking of a disguise, sometimes as the opposite sex: "Déguiser en faisant prendre l'habit d'un autre sexe, ou d'une autre condition. *On le travestit en femme pour le sauver de prison. On a travesti des soldats en paysans pour surprendre la Place*" (2:873; italics original).

[192] Jacques Necker, *Compte rendu au Roy* (Paris: Imprimerie royale, 1781), 103.

sociability based on a moral understanding of duty and directly informed by the values of her Swiss childhood and the theological tenets of her Calvinist faith.

From this perspective, Suzanne Necker's performance can be read as a fundamental breach of salon etiquette and a powerful statement of non-conformity. By refusing the mirroring imperative so integral to the practice of elite sociability, she threatened the cohesion of the elite sociable project itself. Unlike interlopers like Rousseau, whose behaviours and writings could be summarily rejected or officially banned, Suzanne Necker, as the wife of the politically powerful Jacques Necker, could not so easily be dismissed. Indeed, Madame Necker's idiosyncracies, while troubling, had to be tolerated. Not only did her husband ascend to the highest echelons of political power, but, as his devoted and loving wife, she was his intimate ally. As such, her salon could be understood as the direct conduit to his inner circle. In this sense, Madame Necker's mediocre sociable performance, glossed over by so many of her biographers, must be seen as intrinsic to understanding her autobiographical presentation.

Chapter 2:
Display, Exile, Longing, and Communion: Abjection and the Calvinist Body

Pour moi, je vous l'avoue, je ne dis pas avec les philosophes, Je pense, donc je suis; je dis, Je pense, donc Dieu est. *Cette idée est inseparable du sentiment de mon être; elle comprend tout pour moi, elle satisfait tous mes goûts, elle répond à tous mes penchans: je n'ai plus de curiosité, le mot de l'énigme est trouvé; je n'ai plus de désir, tous mes voeux sont remplis; je n'ai plus d'incertitude, ma route est tracée.*[193]

There are in man, so to speak, two worlds, over which different kings and different laws have authority.[194]

Suzanne Necker's mediocre sociable performances rested on a foundation of profound religious alterity. Hers was not an elite sociable body; rather, it was a Calvinist body, whose contours bore witness to the principles of the reformed faith. Madame Necker's religious beliefs were central to her life. She made a regular point of acknowledging her spiritual duties to a variety of Swiss friends and acquaintances, displaying her faith to close friends such as Henriette Réverdil and Paul Moultou, as well as to the celebrated Swiss physicist Georges-Louis LeSage and the geologist and

---

[193] Curchod Necker, *Mélanges*, 2:160

[194] Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1559, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 1:847.

meteorologist Jean André De Luc.[195] With them, she shared her belief in God's grace and her submission to his will, even in the face of the powerful temptations and seductions of the irreligious, elite Parisian sociable sphere. She assured Moultou of her religious fidelity by invoking God and her responsibilities to him. "Mon cher ami," she wrote:

> Pouvez-vous me soupçonner un instant? J'ai reçu mes sentimens avec l'existence et vous voudriez que je les abandonnasse dans le temps où mon bonheur en est le fruit? ....Je vis, il est vrai, au milieu d'un grand nombre d'athées; mais leurs arguments n'ont jamais même effleuré mon esprit, et, s'ils ont été jusqu'à mon coeur, ce n'a été que pour le faire frémir d'horreur.[196]

The presence of such passages suggests not only her desire for public devotion, but also for spiritual confession. As she observed, every day was a gift of Providence and should be lived as a whole life in and of itself, "notre premier soin doit être de le consacrer à Dieu."[197]

Madame Necker's comments can be seen as confirmation and proof of her religious piety and fidelity. She envisioned her role as that of spiritual witness, whose beliefs and actions stood in diametric opposition to those of the society in which she found herself. The belief systems of certain philosophers, she contended, threatened the moral virtues foundational to Calvinist belief: religion, piety, filial respect, conjugal love, and patriotism.[198]

---

[195] See Curchod Necker, Letter to DeLuc, avril 1778, ms 2465, BGE)..

[196] Curchod Necker to Paul Moultou, quoted in Haussonville, *Salon*, 1:164. See also similar assurances offered to Henriette Réverdil in Suzanne Curchod Necker, Letter to Henriette Réverdil, ce 10 sept [1768], ms.suppl. 717, BGE.

[197] Curchod Necker, *Mélanges*, 2:146.

[198] "[L]e système de quelques philosophes tend à éteindre tous les intérêts en refroidissant tous les sentimens: religion, piété, respect filial, amour conjugal, amour de la patrie, tous les intérets de la vie se trouvent détruits dans leur livres" (Curchod Necker, *Nouveaux Mélanges*, 2:118).

The previous chapter introduced the idea of competing duties, suggesting a contradiction between the duties Madame Necker owed to elite society and those dedicated to the fulfilment of her responsibilities to her religion. It further intimated that the practice of one's duties–social or spiritual–enabled a claim to virtue. The present chapter further develops this idea, illuminating the nature of Suzanne Necker's Calvinist belief and situating her ideas and actions within the religious, cultural, and historical context of Calvinism. I identify four interlocking ideas–display, exile, longing, and communion–and demonstrate the relationships between these concepts as expressed in the context of Suzanne Necker's life. The final section suggests the possibility of self-imposed exile, whereby subrnissive abjection might be deployed as a panacea for longing and provide a conduit to redemption.

Central to this discussion is the essential impropriety of the abject Calvinist body, an entity suspended between the potential of divine grace and the irrefutable reality of human weakness as understood through the Fall.[199] Madame Necker, a devout Calvinist transplanted to the Parisian salon, was divided, torn between the social duties of her corporeal, earthly existence and the spiritual duties required to achieve full communion with God.

This intersection of exile, longing, and desire–as manifest in the abject Calvinist body–is integral to understanding Suzanne Necker's contradictory and conflicted performance of self on the Parisian salon stage. Such a conceptualization

---

[199] I refer here to the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden as a result of their decision to eat from the tree of knowledge. William Monter argues that Calvinist suffering emerges from this act of original sin, suggesting that the principles of Calvinist marriage required each couple to accept the consequences of that act (William Monter, "Protestant Wives, Catholic Saints, and the Devil's Handmaid: Women in the Age of Reformations," in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, eds. Renate Bridenthal, Claudia Koonz, and Susan Stuard [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987], 205).

necessarily places her in a tenuous position. Continually waging battle against competing, yet equally essential, duties, she was finally forced to directly confront and negotiate the complex relationship between duty and desire, a struggle that would no longer be played out on the salon stage, but rather, as subsequent chapters will demonstrate, within the confines of her own body.

Childhood in Crassier: Reflections on a Calvinist Girlhood [200]

Louise Suzanne Curchod was baptized on the second of June 1737, the only child of Louis Antoine Curchod, a village pastor at Crassier, a tiny community near Geneva, and Magdeleine Albert, a Huguenot refugee originally from the city of Montélimar, in the Dauphiné region of France.[201] "La Suzete," as her mother called her,[202] came by her Calvinism naturally. Her father, born in the Vaud region and descended from a French Huguenot mother and Vaudois father, studied under the renowned Jean-Alphonse Turretin[203] at the *Académie de Genève*, matriculating in 1720 with a thesis on a text by St. Paul.[204] He took over the pastorate at Crassier in 1729 and remained in this position until his death in 1760. Mademoiselle Curchod's maternal heritage was equally informed by Calvinist belief. Her mother, born in 1698 to Jean Albert and Magdeleine Répara, was descended from a long line of faithful

---

[200] With apologies to Mary McCarthy.

[201] Eugene Ritter, in *Notes sur Madame de Staël* (Geneva: H. Georg, 1899), writes "Madeleine" (9). Baron Adolphe de Coston, in his *Histoire de Montélimar*, 4 vols. (Montélimar: Bourron, 1886), writes "Magdeleine" (3:378), the spelling which Haussonville uses in his 2 volume biography of his ancestor (Haussonville, *Salon*, 1:11n1).

[202] See ms.suppl. 363, BGE, which contains three letters written by Magdeleine Curchod that make reference to 'la Suzete.'

[203] Jean Alphonse Turretin (1671-1737) was a professor of theology at the *Académie de Genève* and proponent of a more liberal Calvinist theology.

[204] Ritter, *Notes*, 39.

protestants that could be traced back to one Jean Albert, "protestant et marchand, conseiller de ville en 1585 et consul en 1588."[205]

Suzanne Curchod appears to have enjoyed an idyllic childhood surrounded by deeply loved–and loving–parents and relations and the company of good friends.[206] "Mes relations avec Made. Necker ont en quelque sorte précedé sa naissance & la mienne," noted Elie-Salomon-François Réverdil,[207] "puisque nos Parens ont déjà rempli réciproquement les devoirs de l'amitié dans toute ler entendue."[208] From her mother, Mademoiselle Curchod was endowed with the singular beauty that enabled her early social successes and earned her the nickname "la belle Curchod,"[209] while from her father she received her remarkable education. Along with the requisite feminine accomplishments in the fine arts–in Suzanne's case, harpsichord, tympanon, violin and painting–and a solid foundation in Calvinist morality and theology, she studied Latin, Greek, physics, and geometry.[210] In addition to this, Mademoiselle Curchod developed a strong taste for literature, which she explored and expressed as a member of numerous social and intellectual circles in Lausanne

---

[205] Coston, *Histoire*, 3:378.

[206] See, for example, Haussonville, *Salon*, and Eugene Ritter, *Notes*.

[207] Elie-Salomon-François Réverdil (1732-1808) was the eldest son of Henriette and Urbain Réverdil. He spent many years at the Danish court, and later became the tutor of the Crown Prince of Denmark. He visited the Necker family in France and maintained an extended correspondence with Suzanne Necker, which can be found in ms.suppl. 725, BGE).

[208] Elie-Salomon-François Réverdil, Letter to Jacques Necker, 29 Aoust 1798, ms.suppl.728, BGE.

[209] Haussonville, *Salon*, 1:27. Haussonville's two-volume biography, published in 1882, remains the main source for biographical information on Suzanne Necker. Haussonville's work includes the complete texts of numerous letters, many of which, stored in the private family archives at Coppet, are otherwise inaccessible to researchers.

[210] Haussonville, *Salon*, 1:14-15.

and Geneva.[211] Her relationships with such influential individuals as Rousseau, LeSage, Moultou, and Tissot[212] all date from this period.

As a young woman, Curchod was fêted for her beauty and her virtue, even as her intellectual prowess took some of her contemporaries by surprise.[213] One of her early suitors articulated it this way:

> Lorsque j'étudiois en belles-lettres, à Lausanne, M. Darney, notre professeur, nous disoit que vous étiés une exception de votre sexe par vos lumières, et vous proposoit pour notre modèle. Lorsque vous passés dans les rues, toujours entourée d'un cortège d'admirateurs, j'entendois le public qui disoit: "Voilà la belle Curchod!" et je courois aussitôt sur votre passage, où je demeurois le plus longtemps qu'il m'étoit possible.[214]

Mademoiselle Curchod's childhood activities and experiences appear to have conformed to the conventions of eighteenth-century Genevan social and religious culture. Geneva had developed into a thriving metropolis of 20,000 by the early eighteenth century. It was an international city with a flourishing economy that relied heavily on banking and international trade.[215] Increasingly influenced by the sociable practices of the French elite, patrician Genevan society constructed large mansions and cultivated interests in the arts and sciences. Within such a cosmopolitan environment, learning flourished and Geneva produced a fine complement of

---

[211] Haussonville, *Salon*, 1:25-33. See also General John Meredith Read, *Historic Studies in Vaud, Berne, and Savoy*, 2 vols. (London, UK: Chatto & Windus, 1897), which contains detailed information about her leadership of a popular Lausannois social circle, the *Académie des Eaux de la Poudrière*.

[212] Samuel-Auguste-André-David Tissot (1728-1797) was an internationally celebrated, Swiss born doctor. His most famous works, *De l'onanisme* and the *Avis au peuple sur sa santé*, were translated into several languages. Tissot maintained a friendship with Suzanne Necker throughout her life and was her personal doctor during the final years preceding her death.

[213] See a letter from one C.A.R. [Isaac Cardoni] to Suzanne Curchod, cited in Eugene Ritter, *Notes sur Madame de Staël* (Geneva: H. Georg, 1899), 51-52: "Vous êtes – oserais-je le dire? – oui, vous êtes savante. Faut-il s'étonner après cela si le beau sexe sonne l'alarme?"

[214] Quoted in Haussonville, *Salon*, 1:26-27.

[215] Rosenblatt, *Rousseau and Geneva*, 19.

scientists and scholars, among them Horace-Bénédict de Saussure,[216] the eminent scientist recognized for his Alpine research, Georges-Louis LeSage, a physicist perhaps best known for his theory of gravitation, and the controversial political theorist, philosopher, and novelist, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose early work, as Helena Rosenblatt has argued, was directly influenced by his Calvinist upbringing in early eighteenth-century Geneva.[217]

Eighteenth-century Calvinist beliefs were similarly influenced by French ideas and philosophies. The theological approach promoted by Louis-Antoine Curchod's tutor, Jean-Alphonse Turretin (1671-1737), a leading Genevan pastor and professor of theology, revolutionized the practice of Calvinism. In order to understand the nature of Turretin's theological revolution, I will turn briefly to the early history of the protestant reformation. Jean Calvin, the most influential of the second generation of reformers, accepted the reformed faith sometime between 1527 and 1534.[218] Just two years later, he wrote and published the first version of his foundational work, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Upon his arrival in Geneva in 1536, he quickly became an active leader in the newly established Genevan Reformation. Geneva, which had officially accepted the Reformation on 25 May 1536, provided a strategic

---

[216] Horace-Bénédict de Saussure (1740-1799), a physicist, was a noted expert on Alpine research, who based his work on his ascents of the Swiss peaks, in particular Mont Blanc. Suzanne Necker's correspondence includes a series of eight letters written to Saussure. His daughter, Albertine-Adrienne Necker de Saussure, a noted reformer in the area of women's education, was also a close friend of Germaine de Staël and the wife of Jacques Necker, a botanist and nephew to Suzanne Necker's husband, Jacques Necker.

[217] Helena Rosenblatt, *Rousseau and Geneva: From the First Discourse to the Social Contract, 1749-1762* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[218] According to David C. Steinmetz, the actual date of Calvin's conversion is a subject of considerable scholarly disagreement. Those who posit an early conversion point to the possible influence of Lutheran scholars and German students in Orléans and Bourges. Those who subscribe to a later conversion date emphasize the fact that Calvin did not officially "resign his benefices" until 1534 (David C. Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context*, [New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995], 8).

location for the international propagation of the reform and would continue to play a central role in the rise of Protestantism, functioning as a gathering place and beacon for persecuted believers until well into the eighteenth century.

As a reformed pastor, Calvin undertook a far-reaching system of religious and civic reform, developing and proposing a series of *Ecclesiastical Ordinance*s, and expounding on his Biblical perspectives in a wide variety of media.[219] Calvin's reforms affected every aspect of everyday life. In addition to developing a thorough theological doctrine, he also envisioned a complete overhaul of social and civic relations.

At its heart, Calvinist belief extended the trajectories of those of his illustrious predecessor, Martin Luther. Central to the Calvinist reconceptualization of the Church was Calvin's belief in the gospel as the source for Christian life and as the essential tool for Christian duty and law. He insisted on the cultivation of a personal and individual relationship with God and defined the family as the basic unit of the reformed doctrine.[220] Unlike Luther, however, Calvin did not preach salvation by faith, but, by imagining the world as a theatre of glory infused with spiritual longing and desire, encouraged believers' active engagement in their own salvation.[221] Within

---

[219] John Witte, Jr. and Robert M. Kingdon, in *Sex, Marriage, and Family in John Calvin's Geneva, Volume 1: Courtship, Engagement, and Marriage* (Grand Rapids, USA and Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), argue that Calvin's influence can be directly linked with his dominance in the various media available to him. Not only did Calvin preach weekly, but, his sermons were transcribed. In addition to this, his ideas were propagated in pamphlets and by town criers (3).

[220] This can be seen in his repeated counsel to married women, exhorting them to maintain the marriage bond even in the face of continued marital transgressions on the part of their husbands. See Jean Calvin, *The Letters of John Calvin*, trans. Dr. Jules Bonnet, 4 vols. (New York: Burt Franklin, 1972).

[221] For more on the idea of Calvinist longing, see Belden C. Lane, "Spirituality as the Performance of Desire: Calvin on the World as a Theatre of God's Glory," *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 1.1 (2001): 1-30.

Calvinist polity, civic duty was an extension of religious duty, in that it was understood as a way of acknowledging and serving the glory of God. As such, it contributed to divine grace. Reformed Christian believers understood themselves to be fully subordinate to the will of God, who was the sole reason for their existence and from whom all goodness flowed. Calvin defined an active religious role for civil government in the realization of divine justice and depended on religious individuals for the propagation of the faith: within the damaged, impure world of man, believers were to craft an earthly space of religious purity, working together with other like-minded individuals to build a community of grace which could function as a beacon to those who had not yet accepted the reformed faith.[222]

Calvin's moral and civic reforms had a profound impact. The actions of reformed believers, governed by a belief in absolute submission to divine will, were supervised by the disciplinary power of the Consistory[223] and controlled by a series of ecclesiastical ordinances which sought to regulate every aspect of moral and civic activity. The five articles of the reformed faith, professed at the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) and reconfirmed in 1675 by the Helvetic Consensus Formula,[224] further

---

[222] These beliefs underpinned Madame Necker's charitable endeavours, which will be explored in greater detail later in this chapter.

[223] The Consistory, the central institution of Calvinist civic practice, was a juridical body that enforced Genevan moral discipline. Consisting of lay elders and local ministers, it met weekly to hear cases and pass judgements. The Consistory ruled on larger issues such as adultery and divorce, but also examined instances of moral weakness, such as laggard church attendance or failure to pray. The Consistory heard some 300 cases per year, the majority of which concerned the actions of women. For more on the relationship between women and the Consistory, see Watt, "Women and the Consistory,"429-38 and Elisabeth M. Wengler, "Women, Religion, and Reform in Sixteenth-Century Geneva." Ph.D., Boston College, 1999.

[224] One of the authors of the Helvetic Consensus Formula was François Turretin (1623-1687), father of the liberal reformer, Jean-Alphonse Turretin.

cemented Calvinist beliefs in doctrines such as "total depravity" and "arbitrary redemption."[225]

Turretin's approach was very different. Impressed by the rationalist principles of the Cartesian method, he sought to prove the nature of God through the use of reason.[226] Central to his theological approach was a fundamental belief that reason and faith were not inimical to one another:

> Since both are sources of truth they should not contradict each other. In addition, since God himself is the author of both the light of reason and the light of revelation, one should use them both in concert.[227]

During his tenure, Turretin was responsible for moving the Genevan church away from the rigid strictures of the Helvetic Consensus Formula.[228] Through the ideas of Turretin and his successors, Calvinist theological doctrine was transformed and strict theological conformity gave way to a broader world view in which religious belief came to be understood as a way of maintaining society's moral framework. Similar ideas underpin Jacques Necker's *De l'importance des opinions réligieuses* (1788), a largely deist work that conceived religious belief as central to the success of a strong

---

[225] The doctrine of total depravity held that all humans were born in sin and that they could not escape their sinful state. The doctrine of arbitrary redemption held that mercy and grace were bestowed only by God, who, as the creator of the world, was also the final arbiter and judge. For more on the Synod of Dort, see *The iudgement of the synode holden at Dort, concerning the fiue Articles* (London: John Bill, 1619).

[226] Klauber, *Reformed Scholasticism*, 10. See also Jeffrey R. Watt, *Choosing Death: Suicide and Calvinism in Early Modern Geneva* (Kirksville, USA: Truman State University Press, 2001), 286-87. Turretin's 'reformation' substantially reshaped the curriculum of the *Académie de Genève*, the traditional training ground for Calvinist ministers. Along with Cartesian natural philosophy, coursework at the *Académie* soon came to include natural sciences, mathematics and natural law (Watt, *Choosing Death*, 284-86).

[227] Klauber, *Reformed Scholasticism*, 111.

[228] The Formula was officially struck down in Geneva in 1725 (Watt, *Choosing Death*, 287).

government, essential to societal peace and well-being, and integral to individual happiness. [229]

The 'reasonable reform' of eighteenth-century Calvinism is evident in the movement's increased interest in promoting the civic responsibilities of the reformed believer. Good citizens, Turretin argued, were good Christians; the two were inseparable from one another.[230] Sociability, the cornerstone of French elite behavior, was resurrected as the foundation of Calvinist community. According to the words of the Swiss jurist Jean-Jacques Burlamaqui:[231]

> la SOCIÉTÉ ... n'est point l'ouvrage de l'homme: c'est Dieu lui-même qui en est l'auteur...[La société], qui par les secours que les hommes tirent les uns des autres, leur procure toutes les connoissances, toutes les commodités & les douceurs qui font la sûreté, le Bonheur & l'agrément de la vie! Il est vrai que tous ces avantages supposent que les hommes, bien loin de se nuire, vivent dans une bonne intelligence, & entretiennent cette union par des offices réciproques.[232]

Sociable relations also changed on another level. In the face of an ever-growing patrician class and an equal increase in religious leaders drawn from that class, the church revisited its perceptions of wealth. Within the eighteenth-century framework, wealth was no longer seen as evil in and of itself, but could be combined with virtue.[233] The acknowledgement of social and economic disparity carried with it the responsibility to act, a process whereby the redistribution of monetary wealth

---

[229] Jacques Necker, *De l'importance des opinions réligieuses* (Paris, 1788). For more on this work, see Henri Grange, *Les idées de Necker* (Paris: C. Klincksieck, 1974), 571-614.

[230] Rosenblatt, *Rousseau and Geneva*, 11.

[231] Jean-Jacques Burlamaqui (1694-1748) was a Genevan jurist and law professor whose work sought to integrate Christian theology with natural law. Burlamaqui conceived the individual as an inherently social being, inextricably linked to a larger community, and in this sense, can be seen as a direct inheritor of a Calvinist tradition which also sought to place the individual within a social context. His principal works include *Principes du droit naturel* (1747) and *Principes du droit politique* (1751).

[232] Jean-Jacques Burlamaqui, *Principes du droit naturel*, 2 vols. (Geneva: Barrillot, 1748), 1:56-57.

[233] Rosenblatt, *Rousseau and Geneva*, 24.

could be considered an active contribution to the individual's salvation. This more liberal approach, in which sociability was deployed in support of charitable initiatives and integrated into ideas of public service, was most certainly the environment in which young Mademoiselle Curchod was raised. Indeed, her broad educational background and later social débuts in Lausanne and Geneva suggest her family's adherence to Turretin's principles.

Her training also recalls ideas put forward by Ami Lullin (1695-1756), one of the leading figures of eighteenth-century Calvinism. Lullin, a Genevan pastor and professor of ecclesiastical history at the *Académie de Genève*, was the son of a wealthy manufacturer, merchant and banker, and heir to the greatest fortune in the city. He was also a writer, whose oeuvre includes four manuscript notebooks dedicated to the "woman of merit," unpublished writings which apparently circulated throughout elite Genevan society.[234] Here, Lullin developed the idea of the ideal wife for a well-born man. Drawing on his theological training and his elite social status, Lullin crafted a womanly ideal whose contours evoked the grace, charm, and *esprit* of elite society while at the same time celebrating the modesty, humility, and service of the good wife and mother. In addition to this, the woman of merit possessed a broad education, which included geography, Greek and Roman history, modern history, logic, poetry, language, and algebra, as well as a thorough grounding in Calvinist moral precepts and teachings.[235] Lullin appears to draw on the writing of the

---

[234] Renevey-Fry, *Le prince charmant*, 35. See also Helena Rosenblatt, "On the 'Misogyny' of Jean-Jacques Rousseau: the *Letter to d'Alembert* in Historical Context," *French Historical Studies* 25.1 (2002): 91-114.

[235] Quoted in: Renevey-Fry, *Le prince charmant*, 36.

Marquise de Lambert, whose work he recommended.[236] Indeed, Lambert suggested that a good education for girls could be seen as a virtue, writing: "Great Care is taken about intailing of Estates, to secure them to Posterity; it would be well if the same Care was taken to make certain Virtues hereditary, that they might descend from the mother to the daughter, instead of breeding them up in ignorance to save Expence."[237]

Lullin's *femme de mérite*, situated at the juncture between sociability and service, incarnated virtue:

> On trouve en elle la Femme sensée; la vraye Chrétienne; la femme éclairée; l'Epouse, la Mère, la Parente, l'Amie consacrée à ses Devoirs; la Femme d'ordre et active; la Femme forte et courageuse; la Femme du Monde dont les manières nobles et engageantes sont un modelle; et pour tout dire la Vertue modeste; qui, contente de l'acquit de ses Devoirs fuït l'éclat, cherche bien moins l'approbation publique que celle de son propre coeur, et de mériter la tendresse d'un digne Mari.[238]

Within Lullin's framework, wealthy Calvinist women embodied the promise of the Calvinist faith: as guardians of elite sociability within the public sphere and guarantors of the faith at a domestic level, their role was central to the actualization of Calvinist practice in the earthly sphere. On a corporeal level, the female body was no longer only a domestic body, but came to be directly associated with society, and, at a larger level, the *patrie*, or nation.

---

[236] Anne Thérèse de Marguenat de Courcelles, Marquise de Lambert, *The Marchioness de Lambert's letters to her son and daughter, on true education, &c. &c. &c.* (London: Cooper, 1749; Eighteenth Century Collections Online), http://galenet.galegroup.com.proxy.lib.sfu.ca/servlet/ECCO.

[237] Lambert, *Letters*, 100.

[238] Ami Lullin, "Deuxième cahier sur la Femme de Mérite," ms. Lullin 51, BGE.

It is easy to recognize the youthful Suzanne Curchod in this portrait. Pious, well educated, and charming, Mademoiselle Curchod was a young woman who fully merited the attentions and accolades of her contemporaries. Her behaviour and beliefs promised a virtuous future and a life of happiness. If this is the case, what then, can we make of the struggle between sociable and domestic duty that informed Madame Necker's Parisian existence? Lullin's liberal vision, and Mademoiselle Curchod's successful actualization of it, would appear to serve as ideal preparation for her subsequent social roles. Why, then, did her contemporaries question her abilities? Why did her sociable performances fail to live up to the standards of the Parisian elite? Furthermore, why did Madame Necker feel a need to consciously distance herself from the value systems of her French counterparts?

The answer to this question lies in a period of loss and rupture that immediately preceded Suzanne Curchod's arrival in Paris. Louis Antoine Curchod died in 1760, and his wife, Magdeleine, in 1763. The deaths of her parents fundamentally altered Mademoiselle Curchod's previously carefree existence. After her father's death, she was forced to put her educational background to practical use as a governess to members of the Lausannois and Genevan elite, managing to eke out a meagre existence upon which she and her mother could survive. Families she once counted as friends were now employers who demanded her committed engagement to her pupils.[239] She had neither the time nor the energy for frivolity, sociability, or the pleasures of conversation. In response, she directed her

[239] In a letter to Edward Gibbon, Curchod compared her teaching to a form of slavery (Gibbon, *Letters*, 1:161); Magdeleine Curchod, in a letter to Henriette Réverdil, confirms that her daughter only finished work at five o'clock, after teaching seven hours per day (Magdeleine Curchod, Letter to Henriette Réverdil, undated, ms.suppl. 363, BGE).

resentment toward her ailing mother, whose material needs were a burden, the weight of which she began to resent.[240]

Her mother's subsequent death was a rude awakening that forced Suzanne to re-evaluate her relationship with her parents. In response, she began to develop a profound sense of filial culpability. To Gibbon, she confessed that her father had given up his health in order to support her, and to Élie-Salomon-François Réverdil, she acknowledged the heavy burden of filial neglect, writing "[il n'y a] rien qui puisse tenir lieu du devoir ou qui dédommage de la crainte d'avoir diminué le bonheur de celle qui nous donne la vie."[241] The impact of her losses was further exacerbated by her subsequent decision to leave Switzerland. Taking a position as the personal companion to a wealthy French woman, she left Geneva in early June 1764. The dissonance between what she now perceived as petty resentment and the irretrievable rupture and finality of death haunted her for the rest of her life.

This period of trauma and instability–from the deaths of her parents in 1760 and 1763 to her subsequent emigration to France in June 1764–offers considerable insight into the moral stance Madame Necker cultivated following the deaths of her parents. Irrevocably marked by loss and overcome with guilt, she turned to her religious belief for sustenance. "Je vous assure que malgré les charmes que le monde et ma situation me presentent," she wrote to Madame Réverdil in 1768, "je cherche Dieu comme le souverain bien ainsi que vous me le conseillés."[242] For Madame Necker, Calvinist belief became inextricably linked to her experiences of

---

[240] "...je m'en prenois à toi de toutes les contrariétés de ma vie, parce que de toi seule dépendoit mon bonheur" (Quoted in Haussonville, *Salon*, 1:88).

[241] Curchod Necker, Letter to Élie-Salomon-François Réverdil, 1770, ms.suppl. 725, BGE.

[242] Curchod Necker, Letter to Henriette Réverdil, ce 10 sept [1768], ms.suppl. 717, BGE.

loss. The losses of her carefree childhood, her parents, and ultimately, her nation, manifested themselves in the form of corporeal exile, a gesture of submissive abjection through which she sought to acknowledge and atone for her failings. Over the next thirty years, Suzanne developed an intimate theology of abjection founded on four inter-related themes: display, exile, longing, and communion.

These four ideas blend seamlessly into one another in Madame Necker's writing. Her love for God, for example, was manifest through her longing for her dead mother and duty to her memory.[243] These obligations, realized in the form of charitable endeavours towards "les infortunés de cette communion qui sont isolées au milieu des Catholiques,"[244] enabled her, on the one hand, to seek communion with God, but also, on the other, to publicly display her fidelity, and in so doing, expand the network of protestant belief, thus contributing to the ever-evolving Calvinist understanding of spiritual *patrie*.[245] Spiritual longing and the quest for divine communion were central to the Calvinist experience. Indeed, Belden C. Lane suggests that Calvin relied heavily on theatrical metaphors in order to strengthen his rhetorical presentations, and understood the whole world as a theatre upon which believers enacted their praise. Lane articulates the relationship between display and longing in the following manner: "Spirituality, in Calvin's thinking, is a performance of desire shared by the whole of the universe, a deliberate practice of delight that echoes through every part of the created world....All created reality, extending each

---

[243] Curchod Necker, Letter to Henriette Réverdil, 25 février 1765, ms.suppl. 717, BGE; see also an undated letter from the same collection in which she writes, "Dieu, veuille bénir nos soins, il me sembles que ma chére mére les approuve du haut des cieux; et que j'oserai me présenter devant elle au moment ou je la rejoindrai."

[244] Curchod Necker, Letter to Henriette Réverdil, 15 juillet 1766, ms.suppl. 717, BGE.

[245] Belden C. Lane, "Spirituality as the Performance of Desire: Calvin on the World as a Theatre of God's Glory," *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 1.1 (2001): 1.

moment from the hand of God, is shot through with longing."[246] Calvinist longing emerged from the innate human propensity for sin, which both limited human existence, but also damaged the wonder of divine creation as presented in the theatre of the world.[247] In order to better understand the relationships between display, exile, longing, and communion, I will explore each concept individually. I begin with an overview of the public activities that confirmed her commitment to, and membership in, the Calvinist community.

Suzanne Necker and the Display of Calvinism

Evidence of Suzanne Necker's adherence to Calvinist principles and of her desire to publicly display her fidelity is readily available. Madame Necker's commitment to her faith expressed itself in two ways: in material terms, through her charitable endeavours, and in spiritual terms, through her public writings. From the practical, domestic concerns of family to the provision of public charity and philosophical reflections on the meaning of religion in daily life, her activities speak to a conscious awareness of the importance of her reformed beliefs and her deep desire not only to ensure her adherence to its tenets, but also to display these beliefs in a public way. Most obvious, perhaps, are the personal choices she made as an adult in Paris: she was married in the Reformed chapel of the Dutch Embassy in Paris, and baptized and later married her daughter there. In addition to this, she consciously chose to educate her daughter within the Calvinist tradition, requesting Calvinist educational materials and advice from Madame Réverdil.[248]

---

[246] Lane, "Spirituality," 1.

[247] Lane, "Spirituality," 9-10.

[248] Curchod Necker, Letter to Henriette Réverdil, 10 septembre [1768], ms.suppl. 717, BGE.

Such an approach was highly characteristic of the reformed faith, which envisioned moral reform in both spiritual and civic spheres. When Calvin, together with Guillaume Farel,[249] implemented reformist principles in Geneva, he concentrated not only on the workings of the church and the faith of his parishioners, but also on the development of strong civic institutions–like the Consistory–that could publicly support the moral foundation of the reformed polity. In response to the precepts and teachings of Geneva's spiritual leaders, Madame Necker sought to use her wealth for good by cultivating an active role for herself in the provision of public charity. If the world was a mirror reflecting the purpose and ideals of divine grace, as she suggested, then that world had an obligation to aspire to grace. For Madame Necker, a wealthy woman who enjoyed the economic benefits of a successful and politically powerful husband, *bienfaisance*–or charity–was a natural avenue for expressing the civic aspects of her Calvinism.

Suzanne Necker's extended financial and moral support of impoverished family members and colleagues in Switzerland offers one striking example of her commitment to addressing the needs of the poor and suffering in her community.[250] As a newly wealthy woman, she was still able to recall her own family's financial struggles.[251] She was also disturbed by the immensity of her wealth and by the extreme expenditures required for the successful realization of an elite Parisian

---

[249] Guillaume Farel (1489-1565) was a French reformer who established the reform movement in Neuchâtel, Vaud, Berne and–together with Calvin–Geneva.

[250] For more information regarding Necker's charitable endeavours towards her Swiss family and friends, see Valérie Hannin, "Une ambition de femme au siècle des Lumières: Le Cas de Madame Necker," *Cahiers staëliens* 36 (1985): 5-19; and Berthe Vadier, "La mère de Mme de Staël et sa parenté au pays de Vaud," *Etrennes helvétiques* (1901): 287-324.

[251] "Née moi même sans fortune" (Suzanne Curchod Necker, Letter to an unidentified correspondent, A St Ouen, ce 17 may, DO 32/51, BGE.

existence.[252] Through her charitable program, initiated with the assistance of Henriette Réverdil and enacted in response to her mother's final wishes,[253] she sponsored a wide array of beleaguered family members, most of them women and children. Among her beneficiaries were the children of the Albert family, two sons and three daughters whom she supported throughout their education and into professional–but socially appropriate–placements in Lausanne. Using connections established during her youth, she sought out appropriate tutors for young M. Albert and morally sound domestic work for the girls. In addition to the Albert children, she supported two aunts: Tante Bellami, who lived in relative isolation and extreme poverty, and Madame Puthod, a devout woman with numerous children and a ne'er-do-well husband.[254] Finally, she made provision for her family's old and trusted servant, Marion Pellet.[255] In each of these cases, she was concerned not only with economic viability, but also with moral development, and she ensured that her funds would be directed with those ends in mind.[256] Madame Necker supported these

---

[252] Suzanne Necker expressed her discomfiture in numerous letters to Mme Réverdil, touching on topics such as her ineptitude for Parisian high society, the cost of maintaining a home in Paris and her discomfort with bringing an ailing and suffering aunt to Paris, a woman whose dress, manners and way of speaking would be entirely at odds with the expectations of the world around her. See Curchod Necker, Letters to Henriette Réverdil, ms.suppl. 717, BGE.

[253] "Le point principal que je voulois traitter avec vous Madame, c'est les trois filles Albert,.... je crains je vous avouë de ne pas executer comme je le dois les ordres de ma mère, si je ne m'occupe pas de l'education de tous ces malheureux enfants" (Curchod Necker, Letter to Henriette Réverdil, 8 juin 1774, ms.suppl. 717, BGE).

[254] J.A. Fatio, Letter to Suzanne Curchod Necker, Undated, ms.suppl. 716, BGE.

[255] See Curchod Necker, Letters to Henriette Réverdil, ms.suppl. 717, BGE.

[256] At one point, for example, she expressed concern over the behaviour of Lisette Albert, asking if it might be possible to correct "les effets du mauvais sang qu'elle a recue" (Curchod Necker, Letter to Henriette Réverdil, 8 juin 1774, ms.suppl. 717, BGE.

individuals and families for many years and received regular reports on their progress.[257]

In addition to practicing her Calvinist faith on a material level, she also reflected on the issue in a philosophical and moral sense, using the medium of print as a podium for the public display of her Calvinist belief. Particularly relevant are the ideas underpinning her treatise against divorce, the *Réflexions sur le divorce*, written in the last year of her life and published in 1794, within a few months of her death.[258]

The main purpose of the *Réflexions* was to argue against the 1792 French revolutionary law legalizing divorce.[259] "On vient donc de publier cette loi dangereuse qui autorise et favorise le divorce," she wrote:

> ce n'étoit pas assez des divisions attachées à l'esprit de parti; il falloit encore disjoindre les époux, isoler les enfans, et combattre toutes les affections naturelles; c'est cependant leur réunion qui forme la Patrie et qui la protège; ce sont les rameaux d'un arbre sacré, qu'on ne peut en séparer successivement sans laisser sa tige chauve et déshonorée.[260]

Drawing in particular on republican values that emphasized the role of the family in the construction of society, Madame Necker echoed the sentiments put forward by Burlamaqui, who also insisted that the family was the basis of the *patrie*. For Suzanne Necker, divorce threatened the stability of society as a whole and, as such,

---

[257] Madame Necker received a lengthy and eminently favourable report on young M. Albert, written by Fatio, his instructor in Lausanne. See J.A. Fatio, Letter to Suzanne Curchod Necker, undated, ms.suppl.716, BGE.

[258] .The *Réflexions* appeared simultaneously in French and Swiss publications. See Suzanne Curchod Necker, *Réflexions sur le divorce* (Lausanne: Durant, Ravanel & Cie; Paris: P.F. Aubin et Desenne, 1794). Contemporary scholarship on this work is extremely limited. See Janet Whatley's 2001 article, "Dissoluble Marriage, Paradise Lost,"144-53; J. Faurey, *Madame Necker et la question du divorce* (Bordeaux: J. Bière, 1931); Boon, "Dutiful Wife."

[259] The 1792 law, enacted by the *Assemblée nationale*, allowed for the possibility of divorce on three grounds: matrimonial fault (which did not include adultery), mutual consent, and incompatibility.

[260] Curchod Necker, *Réflexions*, 5.

undermined the concept of communal identity so central to Calvinist belief and practice.

On the surface, however, this deeply conservative work appears to align itself with Catholic interdictions against divorce and seems to directly contradict the teachings of Jean Calvin, which specifically allowed for the possibility of divorce. Yet a more in-depth look at Calvinist practices reveals a very different perspective. Illuminating, in this case, are the dissonances between the basic beliefs underpinning Catholic and Reformed understandings of marriage. Within the Catholic faith, marriage was understood as a sacrament and the ritual of marriage, as a result, as transformative. The act of marriage was a benediction that removed sin and, in the process, initiated the couple into the understandings of the Catholic church as a whole. Like baptism, marriage within the Catholic church was seen as a confirmation of acceptance into the Catholic faith, with all the benefits and responsibilities that this entailed.[261] From this perspective, indissolubility is self-evident: the contracting of marriage between man and woman was akin to the union between Christ and the Church. Marriage symbolized not only the commitment of each spouse to the other, but also a parallel commitment of the spouses to the Church and, further, of the Church to Christ.

Calvinist understandings of marriage were very different. First and foremost was Calvin's assertion that marriage was not a sacrament: "For it is required that a sacrament be not only a word of God but an outward ceremony appointed by God to confirm a promise. Even children will discern that there is no such thing in

[261] Witte and Kingdon, *Sex, Marriage, and Family*, 31-32.

matrimony."[262] Calvinist marriage still reflected the union of Christ and the Church, but did not bestow grace. Rather, the Calvinist institution of marriage was more engaged with practical matters: it existed to promote fidelity, to create children, and to encourage love between husband and wife.[263] Madame Necker's reasoning followed the more concrete understandings of the Calvinist tradition. She argued that marriage had to be upheld for the sake of spousal happiness, the happiness of children emanating from the marriage, and the maintenance of social conventions.[264]

The stated purpose of the *Réflexions*–to argue for the indissolubility of marriage–would appear to directly contravene Calvinist civil approaches to the institution of marriage, in particular, the much-vaunted right to divorce which so clearly delineated the boundaries between Catholic and Calvinist practice. A closer look at Calvin's practical approach to the dissolution of marriage suggests not only a far more conservative ethos, but also a distinctly gendered approach to family values. Not only did Calvin, in his 1546 *Marriage Ordinance*, offer two gendered models for the dissolution of marriage, a framework that effectively rendered woman-initiated divorce almost impossible to obtain,[265] but he also regularly counselled his female adherents *against* divorce, instructing them that the emotional trials and sufferings caused by the actions of an unfaithful spouse could be seen as God's tests of faith and fidelity:

---

[262] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2:1481.

[263] Witte and Kingdon, *Sex, Marriage, and Family*, 39.

[264] Curchod Necker, *Réflexions*, 6. Charmarie Jenkins Blaisdell points out that Calvin considered marriage to be the "most sacred of all relationships" (Charmarie Jenkins Blaisdell, "The Matrix of Reform: women in the Lutheran and Calvinist Movements," in *Triumph Over Silence: Women in Protestant History*, ed. Richard L. Greaves [Westport, USA: Greenwood Press, 1985], 27). Calvinist marriage served four purposes: it fulfilled social requirements for procreation and child rearing, controlled unruly sexual drives, and satisified human needs for companionship (28).

[265] Men were able to petition for divorce after one year of desertion, women had to wait ten. For more detail on this, see Witte and Kingdon, *Sex, Marriage, and Family*, 47-50.

> I easily conceive what sorrows you endure, when you see your yoke-fellow continuing unfaithful to you, and that even after having given you some hope of his amendment, he again returns to his debaucheries of former times. But the consolations which the Scriptures hold out to us should needs have so much the more power over your heart to alleviate your sadness.[266]

Instead of divorce, Calvin urged patience, devotion, and prayer. Ultimately, as Jeffrey Watt observes, Calvin "[believed] that a permanent separation was a travesty of marriage which was unfair to the innocent spouse."[267]

Given this background, Madame Necker's conservative stance with regard to divorce is not all surprising, nor does it undermine the essentially Calvinist nature of her work. In view of these conceptual theological differences, Suzanne Necker's criticisms against divorce can be clearly linked to the principles of her Calvinist upbringing, even as they were, ironically, more frequently deployed in favour of Catholic arguments against divorce during the subsequent century.[268] Necker's charity work and published treatise, both public testaments to her commitment to demonstrate her faith in action, combine to offer a broad picture of her understanding of Calvinist practice and her role as a member of the reformed polity. As public projects, they lent credence and authority to her auto- and biographical presentations as a woman of faith and piety. At the same time, such a positioning also had the effect of further distancing her from elite Parisian social conventions and practices. Within elite Parisian society, marriage was a way of cementing

---

[266] Jean Calvin, in a letter to Madame de Grammont dated, Geneva, 28th October 1559. See Calvin, *Letters*, 4:71

[267] Watt, "Women and the Consistory," 436.

[268] Reprinted numerous times, most recently in 1928, the *Réflexions* also represents the longest lasting public display of Madame Necker's Calvinism (Curchod Necker, *Réflexions sur le divorce* [Paris: A. Michel, 1928]). For more on French divorce legislation throughout the nineteenth century, see Boon, "Dutiful Wife," forthcoming.

fortunes and building allegiances, an approach that wholly undermined the sanctity of marriage and subverted the principles of companionship and care that underpinned Calvinist beliefs.[269]

Madame Necker's public activities are not, however, the only sources of insight into her moral stance and belief. The thoughts expressed in her *Mélanges* and *Nouveaux Mélanges*, together with those shared in letters to Henriette Réverdil, offer an intimate portrait of her personal theology, and as private musings, function as a fascinating counterpoint to the civic manifestations of her belief. This is not to suggest that the two realms of her faith–spiritual and civic–never overlapped. This relationship was, in fact, a symbiotic one. Her civic duties enabled her to recognize her spiritual duties and to envision the possibility of paradise. Her acknowledgement of human suffering, for example, allowed her to practice her virtue, thus bringing her closer to an ideal spiritual relationship with God. "Combien la religion change le tableau de la vie!" she exclaimed, "[L]es douleurs mêmes du corps sont le présage d'une nouvelle existence: nos défauts et ceux des autres nous offrent un double moyen d'exercer nos vertus; ainsi le paradis est déjà dans notre pensée..."[270]

---

[269] While opinions shifted towards unions based on sentiment during the course of the eighteenth century, French aristocratic marriages were normally arranged marriages which partnered young women–often teenagers–to socially-suitable husbands in the hopes of furthering politically advantageous connections. In many cases, such marriages existed in name only. According to Cissie Fairchilds, the realities of aristocratic marriages came as a shock to most new wives. "At worst, they were bullied and threatened by everyone in the household...at best, they were simply ignored" (Cissie Fairchilds, "Women and Family," in *French Women and the Age of Enlightenment*, ed. Samia I. Spencer [Bloomington, USA: Indiana University Press, 1984], 98). In addition to this, while French law denied the possibility of outright divorce, separation was legal. Such was the case for Madame d'Epinay, for example, who, with the support of her father-in-law, petitioned for and was granted a *séparation des biens* in 1749 (Mary Seidman Trouille, *Sexual Politics in the Enlightenment: Women Writers Read Rousseau* [Albany, USA: State University of New York, 1997], 98).

[270] Curchod Necker, *Mélanges*, 1:93.

Most remarkable, in this regard, are the intimate, reflective epistles she wrote directly to God.[271] These letters, of which only a few remain, suggest that Necker developed a highly personal relationship with God, a relationship characterized by supreme introspection, an intense desire to attain a position of deep spiritual communion, and the knowledge that such communion was possible only after death. The letters are characterized by loss, longing, and desperate isolation. While Madame Necker recognized the power of divine grace, she was intimately aware of the immense chasm that separated her from God: "Je t'adore et je m'élève jusqu'à toi. Mon amour fait évanouir la distance qui nous sépare; il est immense comme elle."[272] Taking a position of submissive abjection, she fully acknowledged the depth and magnitude of her moral failings, recognizing herself as a weak being corporeally marked by her suffering and wholly undeserving of divine grace and intervention:

> Que laisserai-je d'ailleurs?....une machine a demi usée qui semble m'avertir chaque jour de l'instant du départ, qui se refuse à tous mes sentiments et qui m'en suggère souvent de contraires à ma raison. Si c'est donc ta volonté; oh! Mon Dieu, termine sans douleur une vie que tu as comblée de tes faveurs les plus particulières, mais qui est empoisonnée par des remords, par des souvenirs, par le dédain et l'ingratitude.....Mon Dieu, daigne jeter sur ta créature un regard de bonté et pardonne à la témérité de sa prière.[273]

More significant is the undercurrent of isolation and alienation that characterizes her devotional relationship. Necker evokes the paradoxical loneliness of moral struggle: only God can help her recover, but she is unworthy of his grace. "Je suis à la source

---

[271] Haussonville, *Salon*, 2:15-19.

[272] Quoted in Haussonville, *Salon*, 2:15.

[273] Quoted in Haussonville, *Salon*, 2:18-19.

du bonheur," she exclaimed, "mais il s'échappe loin de moi comme un fleuve rapide, et bientôt il va se perdre dans un précipice inconnu."[274]

This was, without a doubt, a confessional relationship: Madame Necker was deeply aware of her personal transgressions and longed to overcome them. However, it differed significantly from a Catholic penitential relationship. She did not confess her sins to an anonymous church leader within the quiet isolation and security of the confessional, but rather, carried her moral weaknesses within her own body.[275] Her confessional acts, as autobiographical gestures, were corporeally imprinted in such a way that the sufferings of her body reflected the moral anguish to which she was subject.[276] In this sense, she was her own confessor.[277] Witness to her personal transgressions, she was also the author of her own self-inflicted exile.

Madame Necker's intimate theology, a relationship with God founded upon her experience of loss and read through the memory of her beloved mother, exemplifies what Calvin defined as the continuous internal struggle of the reformed believer. Calvin perceived a paradoxical relationship between the individual and God. While this relationship was oppositional, it was also, at the same time, symbiotic. On the one hand, God was perceived as the author of good, and the individual, filled with

---

[274] Quoted in Haussonville, *Salon*, 2:15.

[275] Madame Necker, acting as her own judge and jury, internalized the juridical power of the Consistory.

[276] Thomas, for example, linked her illnesses with her desire to fulfill her various duties: "Je crains, madame, que vous ne fassiez pas tout ce qu'il faut pour rétablir votre santé. Je crains, pour vous, cette activité de devoir, qui vous dévore, et qui vous fait sans cesse sacrifier vous-même à ceux que vous aimez" (Antoine-Léonard Thomas, Letter to Suzanne Curchod Necker, A Auteuil, ce 12 août 1781, in *Oeuvres complètes*, 6:260).

[277] Such a stance recalls the intense self-scrutiny which accompanied the actualization of the elite sociable ideal.

sin, as necessarily the author of evil.[278] On the other hand, the reformed individual was a part of God, and therefore, enveloped in his grace.[279] Indeed, as Calvin observed:

> We are not our own: in so far as we can, let us therefore forget ourselves and all that is ours. Conversely, we are God's: let us therefore live for him and die for him. We are God's: let his wisdom and will therefore rule all our actions. We are God's: let all the part of our life accordingly strive toward him as our only lawful goal.[280]

Calvin's approach suggests a tension between two parallel realms: the unfortunate reality of a fallible and inevitably flawed earthly realm, the site of human suffering in which the reformed believer sought grace through the enactment of civic and religious duties, and the inherent purity of the spiritual realm, the longed-for site of divine grace and communion with God.[281]

This split was perhaps most evident within the human body itself, which Calvin's theology posited as the site of the essential and irrevocable rupture between the spiritual and earthly realms.[282] This body, created in the image of God as proof of God's grace and evidence of his power, was a sacred space, "un miroir qui réfléchit

---

[278] Irena Backus and Claire Chimelli, eds., *La vraie pitié: Divers traités de Jean Calvin et Confession de foi de Guillaume Farel* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1986), 7.

[279] Suzanne Necker recognized and commented on this aspect of Calvinist doctrine in her private writings: "Notre ame est une; elle est faite pour suivre une seule idée, comme notre coeur pour aimer une seule personne." See Curchod Necker, *Nouveaux Mélanges*, 2:190.

[280] Calvin, *Institutes*, 1:690.

[281] Calvin emphasized the rupture between earthly and divine spheres as follows: "The one we may call the spiritual kingdom, the other, the political kingdom. Now these two, as we have divided them, must always be examined separately....There are in man, so to speak, two worlds, over which different kings and different laws have authority." See Calvin, *Institutes*, 1:847.

[282] See Calvin, *Institutes*, 1:184: "Furthermore, that man consists of a soul and a body ought to be beyond controversy. Now I understand by the term 'soul' an immortal yet created essence, which is his nobler part."

l'idée et les idées de la Divinité,"[283] and, at the same time, permanently sullied by the inevitable human weakness which resulted from the Fall:

> [L]e malheureux, voulant être quelque chose en soi-même, incontinent commença à oublier et méconnaître d'où le bien lui venait, et par outrageuse ingratitude, il entreprit de s'élever et enorgueillir contre son facteur et auteur de toutes ses grâces.[284]

The lived-in body,[285] positioned at the intersection between divine grace and the fall, was, therefore an inherently troubled space. While the nature of this encounter could be mediated through the believer's dedicated participation in the religious and civic duties deemed essential to the realization of the faith, it was, nonetheless, not enough to reconcile the fundamental contradiction of the Calvinist human condition. The human individual, conceived within Calvinist theology as an essentially communitarian being responsible not only for her own salvation but also for the redemption of her community as a whole, thus sought to achieve grace through the very relationships which corrupted her.

What this suggests is a subtle and complex interplay between the ideas of exile, longing, and communion. Calvin, by postulating a rupture between the spiritual and earthly worlds, put religious believers in a position of alterity, or abjection: a space of exile from which they sought a deliverance that they were never fully able to achieve. The forced exile of the Calvinist believer, as exemplified in the moral abjection of the human body, can be likened to a form of spiritual purgatory. In this

---

[283] Curchod Necker, *Nouveaux Mélanges*, 2:118.

[284] Jean Calvin, "A tous amateurs de Jésus-Christ et de son Évangile, Salut [1535]," in *La vraie pitié: Divers traités de Jean Calvin et Confession de foi de Guillaume Farel*, ed. Irena Backus and Claire Chimelli (Geneva: Labor et Fides), 25-38: 25.

[285] I draw here on phenomenological understandings of the body, which argue for a subjective experience of the body informed by both psychic and somatic influences.

ill-defined space between heaven and hell, the irreconcilable split between believer and creator led to a posture of longing and an intense–if ultimately futile–desire for communion, or wholeness. The believer's material existence, mandated by God, was simultaneously that which denied her full communion with God and that which enabled the relationship to exist at all. Divine grace remained out of reach until death, and even then was uncertain.[286]

Exile and Longing

In a material sense, Calvinist exile and longing manifested themselves in the form of diasporic wanderings. Forcibly exiled from the legal and juridical rights accorded to Catholics, Calvinists were wholly denied the rights of citizenship and forced to seek succour elsewhere. Such was the case with Calvin himself, who fled France in 1534 after professing the protestant faith. Such too, was the case of the thousands of adherents of the "*réligion prétendue reformée*" who fled France in subsequent centuries.[287]

A closer look at Madame Necker's maternal heritage, in particular the experiences of her mother and grandfather, is illustrative in this regard. The Albert

---

[286] See, for example, the third principle of the Calvinist faith, as presented at the Synod of Dort in 1619, which asserts that "All men therefore are conceiued in sinne, and borne the children of wrath, untoward all good tending to salutatoin, slaues of sinne; and neither will, nor can (without the grace of the holy Ghost regenerating them, set streight their owne crooked nature, no[r] not so much as dispose themselues to the amending of it" (*The iudgement of the synode holden at Dort, concerning the fiue Article*s [London: John Bill, 1619]). The principles of the Synod of Dort were upheld by the Helvetic Consensus Formula, approved by the Swiss confederation in 1675 (Jeffrey R. Watt, *Choosing Death: Suicide and Calvinism in Early Modern Geneva* [Kirksville, USA: Truman State University Press, 2001], 283).

[287] The protestant exodus from France has generally been understood as occurring in two waves, the Refuge, which saw some 20,000 Huguenots leave France in the period preceding 1660, and the subsequent "grand Refuge," during which 200,000 Huguenots fled the religious persecutions that emerged as a result of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. Together, these waves formed "the third largest one-shot migration in Early Modern Europe, after the expulsion of the Jews and the Moriscos from Spain in 1492 and 1609, respectively" (Ruymsbeke, "Minority Survival," 6).

family hailed from the Dauphiné region, a well-recognized protestant stronghold.[288] By the late seventeenth century, the family was well-established in Montélimar: Jean Albert worked as a lawyer and his wife, Magdeleine Répara, brought a dowry of 6,300 livres to her marriage.[289] Their two daughters–Magdeleine and Anne–were born within a few years of their marriage. The Albert family might well have stayed in Montélimar, had it not been for the ever-increasing persecutions related to the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes.

The Edict of Fontainebleau, more commonly referred to as the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, was handed down in October 1685 by Louis XIV. It overturned the premise of toleration enshrined in the 1598 Edict of Nantes and introduced a series of stringent measures designed to suppress the spread of the protestant faith in France. Protestants were no longer permitted to practice their religion or baptize or educate their children in a protestant manner, and protestant ministers were banished from the kingdom. Punishments were severe, ranging from fines for refusing to baptize children as Catholics, to imprisonment and death for practicing the faith. Those who chose to leave France experienced significant financial loss, since under the Revocation, all abandoned properties were to be confiscated after four months.[290] This ordinance was subsequently followed by even more stringent proclamations. One of Louis XIV's final acts, an ordinance delivered in March 1715, was a body blow to adherents of the 'réligion prétendue réformée.' In it, he declared that only Catholics could be buried in consecrated ground, and further, that only

---

[288] Marie-Jeanne Ducommon and Dominique Quadroni, *Le Refuge Protestant dans le Pays de Vaud (Fin XVIIe – début XVIIIe siècle)* (Geneva: Droz, 1991), 11.

[289] Coston, *Histoire*, 3:379-80.

[290] "Revocation of the Edict of Nantes (October 22, 1685)" in *Readings in European History*, ed. J.H. Robinson, 2 vols. (Boston: Ginn, 1906), 2:287-291.

children born to baptized Catholics were legitimate children.[291] Finally, in 1724, an even more repressive decree declared all protestant marriage rites invalid, defined protestant wives as concubines of questionable morals, and reaffirmed the status of protestant children as bastards.[292]

Magdeleine Albert and her father left France some time between 1720 and 1723 in the face of mounting persecutions. Magdeleine's sister, Anne, meanwhile, remained in Montélimar in an attempt to retain control of the family property. The family continued to suffer difficulties as a result of the persecutions. After Anne's death, the family property and inheritance were sequestered, becoming only partially accessible in 1732, and finally recovered in 1758 by a family member who was able to produce a "certificat de catholicité."[293] Magdeleine Curchod was, unfortunately, unable to recover these funds before her death. Suzanne Curchod travelled to Montélimar to claim to this inheritance in 1763, just a few months after her mother died.[294]

---

[291] Coston, *Histoire*, 3:377.

[292] Coston, *Histoire*, 3:377.

[293] Coston, *Histoire*, 3:381. Suzanne Necker's role in recovering her family inheritance is the subject of numerous epistolary exchanges between Henriette Réverdil and her son Elie-Salomon-François Réverdil. Madame Réverdil asked her son, stationed in a diplomatic position in Copenhagen, to intervene with the French consul on behalf of the Curchod family. He was unsuccessful, but later expressed his pleasure that Mademoiselle Curchod had been able to retrieve her inheritance. See Elie-Salomon-François Réverdil, Letters to Henriette Réverdil, ms.suppl. 718, BGE.

[294] In 1763, the inheritance consisted of property and material goods, half of which Suzanne's relative finally received permission to sell in November 1764. The monies accrued from the sale, 9,200 livres, were payable to "Mlle Suzanne Curchod, bourgeoise d'Echalens et de Lausanne, ci-devant résident à Crassy, pays de Vaud, comme fille unique et héritière de Louis-Antoine Curchod" in annual payments of 460 livres. See Coston, *Histoire*, 3:382.

The Revocation had far-reaching implications. In 1685, there were about 730,000 adherents of the reformed church living in France.[295] Together they made up just under 5% of the population. Of this group, around 200,000 decided to leave France, seeking exile in such countries as Switzerland, The Netherlands, Great Britain, Germany, and Ireland. This mass emigration, which reached its peak in 1687,[296] was to continue until well into the eighteenth century.[297] The immensity of this migration–over 45,000 Huguenot refugees travelled through Switzerland between 1680 and 1700 alone–had a deep effect on the Calvinist identity and profoundly influenced Calvinist understandings of community. While Switzerland was perhaps perceived as a haven by Huguenots fleeing the restrictions and persecutions that followed the Revocation,[298] it was not a safe and secure haven. A somewhat ill-balanced group of thirteen independent states, Switzerland was religiously divided. The Huguenot refugee crisis exacerbated pre-existing tensions and, in addition to this, the sheer numbers of asylum seekers placed an enormous strain on the small communities that bordered Lake Geneva. As a result, the protestant Swiss cantons did not entirely welcome the refugees. Conceding to the concerns of their Catholic compatriots and faced with an influx of thousands of impoverished migrants, most of

---

[295] Philip Benedict, *The Faith and Fortunes of France's Huguenots, 1600-85* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 94. Marie-Jeanne Ducommon and Dominique Quadroni, however, drawing on the earlier work of Samuel Mours (*Essai sommaire de géographie du protestantisme réformé français au XVIIIe siècle* [Paris: Librairie protestante, 1966]), offer a number of 850,000.

[296] Louis XIV recalled his border guards in 1687. Ducommon and Quadroni, *Le Refuge Protestant*, 36. Louis XIV's order came into force in July 1685, and Ducommun and Quadroni note that 12 000 Huguenots arrived in Geneva in the six month period between July and December 1687, in contrast to the 3000 who entered the city gates during the first six months of the year.

[297] Ultimately, the legal interdictions against the active practice of the protestant faith failed. Adherents fled France and the French church went underground, where it was still able to muster enough numbers for a gathering of the national synod in 1715 (Ruymsbeke, "Minority Survival," 5-6).

[298] Between 1680 and 1700, the peak years of emigration, some 45,000 Huguenot refugees travelled through Switzerland. Of those, only 6000 settled definitively within its borders, most of them, like Suzanne Necker's foremothers, in Vaud.

whom required charitable assistance in some form or another, the reformed cantons did not encourage settlement. Not only did they limit the number of refugees allowed to enter the territories, but they also insisted on the temporary nature of their stay in Switzerland.[299]

The Revocation of the Edict of Nantes offers one powerful example of the material effects of religious persecution. The mass exodus that resulted coloured protestant experience in France, where remaining reformed believers were forced underground, and fundamentally transformed the city of Geneva and the neighbouring *pays de Vaud*. Protestant families, like the Albert family, were divided: their lives uprooted, fortunes appropriated, and cultural traditions lost.

Reconceptualizing Exile: Abjection, Longing, and the Desire for Communion

Involuntary exile and the diasporic existence have generally been equated with the experience of forcible loss. The *Oxford English Dictionary* associates exile with such terms as "enforced removal" and "banishment,"[300] words which resonate strongly with French eighteenth-century understandings of the term.[301] But exile can also be self-imposed, a chosen space for the performance of alterity. Such an approach suggests an internalization of exile, a process whereby suffering, incurred through the experience of exile and loss, becomes intrinsic to exile's identity. This is

---

[299] Refugees were directed to other countries, particularly Germany and The Netherlands. Ducommon and Quadroni, *Refuge Protestant*, 14; 45.

[300] *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. "Exile" http://dictionary.oed.com.proxy.lib.sfu.ca/cgi/entry/50080084 (accessed September 10, 2007).

[301] The *Encyclopédie* entry, "Exil" cross references "Bannissement," which is defined as "un exil ordonné par un jugement en matiere criminelle, contre un accusé convaincu." See Toussaint, "Bannissement (jurisprudence)," *Encyclopédie*, 2:60.

typical of the Calvinist condition. Suzanne Necker suggested that suffering was integral to her religious belief:

> Dans un esprit soumis à la volonté divine, l'habitude des souffrances produit toujours quelque changement moral, et trompe les spectateurs, qui supposent la diminution du mal; mais ils ne voient pas qu'on apprend à supporter les persécutions de la douleur, comme celles d'une étrangère dont on va bientôt se séparer.[302]

According to this conceptualization, loss and suffering are essential to the experience of Calvinism, but are also temporary conditions which precede the spiritual union and "homecoming" only acquired after death.

In this sense, exile must be re-evaluated. When exile is transformed into acceptance, it can be understood as a process whereby loss becomes synonymous with desire and manifests itself through longing, an essential part of the reformed believer's journey of faith.[303] The Calvinist believer who fled France in order to practice her faith was not only fleeing externally imposed religious prosecution, but also consciously seeking exile, a mechanism whereby alterity was actively courted as a way of acknowledging and performing difference. Situated at the intersection between loss and longing, expulsion and desire, the Calvinist believer took on a posture of abjection. Alterity became chosen, so that the diasporic existence of the persecuted Calvinist became integral to her experience and autobiographical identity. Exile, consciously chosen, paved the way for a radical reconceptualization of identity, and, in the case of Calvinism, of community and nation as well.

---

[302] Curchod Necker, *Nouveaux Mélanges*, 2:7-8.

[303] See Lane, "Spirituality," 1-30.

Madame Necker regularly invoked the idea of a spiritual *patrie* in her letters. Using the idea as a way of separating herself from her French associates,[304] she also deployed the term in relation to her Calvinist belief.[305] The Calvinist communion was defined not by physical boundaries, but rather, by religious belief which informed both civic and spiritual spheres. As Calvin observed:

> Let us first consider that there is a twofold government in man: one aspect is spiritual, whereby the conscience is instructed in piety and in reverencing god; the second is political, whereby man is educated for the duties of humanity and citizenship that must be maintained among men....the former resides in the inner mind, while the latter regulates only outward behavior.[306]

In other words, the nation of Calvinism, while conceptualized on an abstract level as a single spiritual community of believers under God, was "another country," but was also physically realized in the form of the nation, with Geneva as its capital. As a result, the Calvinist identity potentially posed a powerful threat to French national identity, stability, and coherence.[307]

This became an issue of profound importance during the eighteenth century, a period during which the rigorous understandings of sixteenth-century Genevan Calvinism gave way to largely aristocratic understandings of social relationships and customs. While Genevan religious and civic leaders continued to espouse Calvin's perspectives on issues of divine grace, they moved from an understanding of the individual as proof of divine grace, to a broader understanding of society as a whole

---

[304] In a letter to her mother, written seventeen years after her mother's death, she questioned her decision to move to Paris, writing: "Pourquoi suis-je rentrée dans cette ingrate patrie dont tu t'étois arrachée? tu fus victime du fanatisme, je le suis d'une stupide insensibilité" (Quoted in Haussonville, *Salon*, 1:87).

[305] Curchod Necker, *Nouveaux Mélanges*, 2:118.

[306] Calvin, *Institutes*, 1:847.

[307] The continuing persecutions of French Huguenots, well into the eighteenth century, suggest that the French state was aware of this threat.

as evidence of providence. Society, suggested the jurist Jean-Jacques Burlamaqui, was not created by man, but rather, by an act of God, which, "par les secours que les hommes tirent les uns des autres, leur procure toutes les connoissances, toutes les commodités & les douceurs qui font la sûreté, le Bonheur & l'agrément de la vie!"[308] The family was conceived as the fundamental unit of society, and further, of the nation itself.[309]

In Suzanne Necker's letters, the *patrie* was associated mainly with the physical space of Switzerland, in particular the Vaud region (including both her hometown of Crassier as well as Lausanne) and Geneva. For Madame Necker, situated in cosmopolitan Paris, this resulted in a sense of physical dislocation that resulted in illness. Indeed, she identified homesickness as one cause for her illnesses, noting that "j'ai besoin de l'air natal."[310] As will be demonstrated in subsequent chapters, Madame Necker's illnesses came to exemplify her social, cultural, and religious alienation from the Parisian social sphere, functioning as a barometer of her spiritual dislocation and a conscious marker of her difference.

Patrie was also, however, linked with the idea of spiritual belonging, in the sense that civic and religious duties were seen as necessary–and indistinguishable–from one another. Paris provided the laboratory in which Madame Necker could contrast her own beliefs with those of her French neighbours: "Le système de quelques philosophes," she observed:

---

[308] Burlamaqui, *Principes du droit naturel*, 1:57.

[309] "Celui qui se présente le premier est l'état de FAMILLE. Cette société est la plus naturelle & la plus ancienne de toutes, & elle sert de fondement à la société nationale: car un people ou une nation n'est qu'un compose de plusieurs familles." See Burlamaqui, *Principes du droit naturel*, 1:59.

[310] Curchod Necker, Letter to Etienette Clavel de Brenles, Paris, le [ ] juin, 1765], IS1915/xxx/h/1, BCUL; see also Golowkin, *Lettres diverses*, 282. The idea of homesickness, or *hemvé*, will be more fully explored in Chapter 4: "Performing Pathology: Staging the Sick Body."

> tend à éteindre tous les intérêts en refroidissant tous les sentimens: religion, piété, respect filial, amour conjugal, amour de la patrie, tous les intérêts de la vie se trouvent détruits dans leur livres, excepté de boire froid et de manger chaud, etc., qui ne peut pas produire beaucoup de grands hommes...[311]

Religious duty was inextricably tied to patriotic duty, so that the obligations of the physical world could never be separated from the parallel obligations to the spiritual world. "Pour qui sait penser," confirmed Madame Necker, "ce monde est par-tout un miroir qui réfléchit l'idée et les idées de la Divinité."[312] What this demonstrates is that the experience of exile was paradoxical, in that it embodied not only rupture, but also desire.

The idea of the nation, or communion, becomes extremely important in the development of Calvinism, particularly in the relationship between Calvinist practice and religious persecution: for many believers, their only 'home' was the spiritual home of the reformed faith. This consideration, combined with Calvin's strong conceptualization of the contradictory antagonistic and symbiotic relationship between spiritual and civic spheres, enabled the conceptualization of Calvinist doctrine and spiritual practice as a form of nation, one nation, indeed, under God. In this sense, "nation" became inextricably linked with ideas of faith, duty, and reform.

The physical state of the nation, while necessarily important in terms of one's geographic location and grounding, was nonetheless of less relevance than the spiritual communion shared by reformers of the protestant diaspora. Nevertheless, the experiences of Madame Necker demonstrate that display, exile, longing, and communion–characteristics intrinsic to the Calvinist refugee experience–continued

---

[311] Curchod Necker, *Nouveaux Mélanges*, 2:118.

[312] Curchod Necker, *Nouveaux Mélanges*, 2:118.

to mark and otherwise influence Calvinist understandings of the relationship between God, self, and nation throughout the eighteenth century.

Chapter 3:
Filial Duty and the Maternal Body: Autobiographical Performance in the Space Between Mother and Daughter

[T]he daughter is for her mother at once her double and another person, the mother is at once overweeningly affectionate and hostile toward her daughter; she saddles her child with her own destiny: a way of proudly laying claim to her own femininity and also a way of revenging herself for it.[313]

Permettez Madame que je finisse en vous assurant de mon plus tendre attachement; ce sera la dernière lettre que j'aurai l'honneur de vous écrire avant que j'ai doublé mon être ou pour meux dire avant que j'aye mis au jour un nouveau coeur pour vous aimer; je sens que mon enfant doit avoir les sentiments de sa mére. [314]

The Calvinist reform had profound implications for women's lives, many of which were appealing. In certain respects, the source of this appeal can easily be discerned. Women were central to the reformed polity. Calvin's theological approach offered them equal opportunity for spiritual communion with God, and, on an earthly level, expanded their role within the family. Under Calvin's leadership, marriage and

---

[313] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (New York: Knopf, 1989), 281.

[314] Curchod Necker, Letter to Etienette Clavel de Brenles, Paris [mars/avril] 1766, IS1915/xxx/h/1, BCUL. See also Golowkin, *Lettres diverses*, 290-91. Golowkin leaves out the first part of this quotation, starting instead with "ce sera."

family became central elements of the reformed faith. The moral transformation initiated by the Calvinist reformation resulted in women's access to more extensive legal rights, including greater access to public education[315] and the right to petition for divorce on the grounds of adultery or desertion.[316]

There were also significant inconsistencies in the Calvinist approach. The increased focus on marriage, combined with the dissolution of convents and the move away from Marian worship left women less able to realize themselves outside of the conventional marriage framework.[317] In addition to this, while women enjoyed increased presence and power within domestic relationships, they were not allowed a public voice in Calvinist theology; rather, their roles were almost entirely circumscribed by the domestic concerns of the private sphere. As a result, the reformed church became heavily identified as a paternalistic institution from which women were virtually excised.[318] As John Lee Thompson explains:

> As a consequence of both creation and fall...woman is subjected to man and is restricted to the private sphere: she is not to teach, preach, or lead–a lesson taught not only by scripture, Calvin says, but by nature and custom as well....On the other hand, Calvin also teaches woman's equality with man, an equality which is manifested in their common humanity, their equality in sin and grace...[319]

Women faced legal double standards and theologically based exclusions. The established institutions of the Calvinist religion continued to propagate the idea of

---

[315] Charmarie Jenkins Blaisdell, "The Matrix of Reform: Women in the Lutheran and Calvinist Movements," in *Triumph over Silence: Women in Protestant History*, ed. Richard L. Greaves (Westport, USA: Greenwood, 1985), 30.

[316] See earlier commentary on the gendered nature of Calvinist divorce laws.

[317] Watt, "Women and the Consistory," 434.

[318] See the doctoral research of Elisabeth M. Wengler on the cases of women brought before the Consistory. Wengler argues that while Calvinist doctine was particularly rigid as it applied to women, women nevertheless found ways around it (Elisabeth M. Wengler, "Women, Religion, and Reform in Sixteenth-Century Geneva," Ph.D., Boston College, 1999).

[319] Thompson, *Daughters of Sarah*, 17.

women's infidelity and inherent untrustworthiness, thus cultivating and nourishing generally held beliefs about women's requisite exclusion from the institutions of power.[320]

The contradictions and tensions between spiritual equality and earthly subordination were most clearly manifest in the reproductive female body. On the one hand, the maternal ideal was one of the prime sites of Calvinist potential.[321] The mother encapsulated both spiritual and civic ideals. Her reproductive body, as the space in which the abstract notions of God, self, and nation converged in the form of the child, represented a concrete manifestation of devotion and offered the promise of everlasting life. Women, as the natural guardians of the domestic sphere, assumed prominence within the family of God as a whole: they were the mothers who, as guardians and teachers of morality, ensured the dissemination and propagation of the faith from generation to generation,[322] and acted as guarantors of their husbands' fidelity. On the other hand, the maternal body was a fundamentally troubled entity whose earthly presence confirmed the abjection of the Fall.[323] As the concrete symbol of Original Sin, the female body represented the impossibility of

---

[320] See Watt, "Women and the Consistory," 429-438.

[321] The virgin birth allowed for the possibility of moral and corporeal purity, thus "[exalting] the status of motherhood" (Richard L. Greaves, "Introduction," in *Triumph Over Silence: Women in Protestant History*, ed. Richard L. Greaves [Wesport, USA: Greenwood Press, 1985], 4).

[322] The research of Nancy Roelker, for example, demonstrates the importance of women to the establishment of the Calvinist faith in France. Not only were the first generations of French Calvinist women more likely than men to take the risk of practicing the outlawed religion, but they were also ideally placed to pass this tradition on, so that, "[t]he special responsibility of the mother for family worship and spiritual instruction of the children, including the sons, became a feature of French Calvinism during succeeding generations" (Nancy L. Roelker, "The Appeal of Calvinism to French Noblewomen in the Sixteenth Century," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 2.4 (1972): 407).

[323] William Monter asserts that each new couple united in reformed marriage "assumed the suffering consequent to the Fall" (William Monter, "Protestant Wives, Catholic Saints, and the Devils' Handmaid: Women in the Age of Reformations," in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, eds. Renate Bridenthal, Claudia Koonz, and Susan Stuard (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 205. Such a posture ensures the subordination of each woman to Eve's original sin.

divine grace and the futility of the human endeavor. The pregnant body evoked dangerous moral afflictions such as lust and seduction, and manifested concrete proof of illicit sexual activity if the woman was not married. Raymond A. Mentzer observes that, "among the surest and plainest evidence of sexual misconduct was an unwed woman who was pregnant or who had recently given birth."[324] Each act of divine creation, in other words, engendered a concomitant sexual act associated with sin. The mother, positioned midway between the divine and the diabolical, was the site of Calvinist exile.

From this perspective, then, I want to continue where the previous chapter left off: from externally imposed exile, I turn now to internally experienced exile. More specifically, this chapter explores the nature and function of Suzanne Necker's performance of maternal abjection. Key to this analysis is the troubled relationship between the sociable body, which fostered Madame Necker's literary desires and ambitions, and the Calvinist body, imprinted with the legacy of Original Sin. The principles of sociable display, described in the first chapter, are deployed by Madame Necker in the service of the domestic, maternal body, a process whereby the public presentation of the Calvinist maternal self in the space of the salon was also simultaneously an act of pious devotion through which she attempted to display her fidelity to God's will. I argue that Madame Necker's salon, as the site of the abject, takes on a dual role in this analysis. Emerging as a space in which virtue can be displayed, it serves also as a stage for the evocation of moral failure. Calvinist exile, longing, and communion, introduced in the last chapter, can be reassessed through

[324] Raymond A. Mentzer, "Morals and Moral Regulation in Protestant France," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* XXXII.1 (Summer 2000): 9.

the maternal body and then explored through the lens of French eighteenth-century understandings of the maternal imperative.

This chapter focuses in particular on the intersection between Madame Necker's understanding of herself as a dutiful daughter and her expectations and experiences of the maternal relationship she later crafted with her own daughter, Anne-Louise-Germaine Necker, later Madame de Staël. Locating Madame Necker in the tenuous space between mother and daughter, this chapter argues that her perceived filial neglect of her mother is critical to understanding her subsequent maternal relationship with her daughter. As she tried to reconcile her religious duties towards her mother and daughter with her human ambitions and desires, she struggled to maintain her relationship with God and to cultivate the virtuous existence she understood as essential to the attainment of true happiness. Fully aware of her personal failings, however, she recognized that this struggle was ultimately futile, thus condemning herself to a position of eternal abjection, a hellish purgatory where duty and desire became indistinguishable from one another, and from which she could never escape. Central to this discussion are eighteenth-century understandings of virtue and, more specifically, the complex relationships between filial duty and maternal desire that played themselves out on the virtuous reproductive body.

Introducing Virtue

Suzanne Necker's name was regularly associated with virtue. She is remembered for her charitable acts, her public devotion to her husband, and her commitment and dedication to her daughter's upbringing. Jacques Necker painted

his wife wholly in terms of domestic virtue, linking his life companion to private sensibilities, succour, support, and understanding.[325] Her virtue existed in her inherent selflessness and generosity, qualities he attributed to her strict moral code and her intense and indomitable reformed religious belief.[326]

The comments of Madame Necker's friends and contemporaries were similarly effusive. The philosopher and academician Antoine-Léonard Thomas, for example, lauded her virtuous behaviour and celebrated her moral character, describing her as a uniquely virtuous individual in a sea of moral decrepitude and excess,[327] while the philosopher and *encyclopédiste* Denis Diderot reflected on what he perceived to be her innate capacity for responding to the needs of others. Comparing Madame Necker's first annual report from the *Hospice de charité*[328] with her husband's *Compte rendu*, Diderot identified Madame Necker's pity, tenderness, and generosity as perfect foils to Jacques Necker's heroic public dignity, writing:

> J'ai désiré *l'Hospice* afin de le joindre au *Compte rendu* et de renfermer dans un même volume les deux ouvrages les plus intéressans que j'aie jamais lus et que je puisse jamais lire. J'ai vu dans l'un la justice, la vérité, le courage, la dignité, la raison, le génie employer toutes leur forces pour réfréner la tyrannie des hommes puissants, et dans l'autre la bienfaisance et la pitié tendre leur mains secourables à la partie de l'espèce humaine la plus à plaindre, les maladies indigens. [329]

---

[325] Necker, *Compte Rendu*, 103.

[326] See the introductory "Observations de l'éditeur" which preface the first volume of Suzanne Necker's *Mélanges*. (Jacques Necker, "Observations de l'éditeur," in Suzanne Curchod Necker, *Mélanges*, 3 vols. [Paris: Pougens, 1798], 1:i-xx.

[327] "...elle est parvenue à une pureté et à une élévation de caractère qui a peu d'exemples, et qui est si fort au-dessus du pays et du siècle méprisable où elle vit" (Necker, "Observations," xviii).

[328] [Curchod Necker], *Hospice de charité* (Paris: Imprimerie royale, 1781).

[329] Quoted in Haussonville, *Salon*, 2:135.

Virtue was a central concept of Enlightenment thought. Theorized by intellectuals as diverse as Rousseau, Diderot, and Bernardin de St. Pierre,[330] it was nevertheless a nebulous concept that remained notoriously difficult to define. While the accolades accorded to Madame Necker, with their associations to morality, piety, generosity, and sensibility, offer some pertinent insights into the matter, they do not tell the whole story.

Traditionally, virtue was a masculine ideal, a construct which drew on a Latin and Roman heritage. The republican virtue of antiquity was also an inherently political concept, linked to ideas of national identity and civic responsibility. During the eighteenth century, however, new understandings emerged. In a general sense, the eighteenth-century thinker understood virtue as an innate human capacity for goodness which manifested itself in the fulfilment of duties and obligations. As Romilly, author of the article "Vertu, (*Ord. encyclop. Mor. Polit.*)" in the *Encyclopédie*, wrote: "mais enfin, qu'est-ce que la vertu? en deux mots c'est *l'observation constante des lois qui nous sont imposées, sous quelque rapport que l'homme se considère.*"[331] For Romilly, the idea of virtue described a state of constant attention and awareness, in which one focused one's gaze entirely on the needs of others. To Romilly's extended discussion, Louis de Jaucourt introduced religious, mythological, and gendered elements.[332] Observing the word's association with the celestial, the

---

[330] See, for example: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Julie, ou, La nouvelle Héloïse: lettres de deux amants habitants d'une petite ville au pied des Alpes* (Paris: Le livre de poche, 2002); Rousseau *Emile*, Trans. Barbara Foxley (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1974); Rousseau, *Confessions*, Vol. 1 (Paris-Coulommiers: Brodard et Taupin, 1963); Paul Henri Bernardin de St. Pierre, *Paul et Virginie* (Paris: Imprimerie de Monsieur, 1789); Diderot, *The Nun*, trans. Russell Goulbourne (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[331] Romilly, "Vertu, (*Ord. encyclop. Mor. Polit.*)," in *Encyclopédie*, 17:176. Italics original.

[332] Jaucourt, "Vertu, (*critiq. Sacrée*)," in *Encyclopédie*, 17:185; Jaucourt, "Vertu, (*Mythol.*)," in *Encyclopédie*, 17:185; Jaucourt, "Vertu, (*lang. franç.*)," in *Encyclopédie*, 17:185.

supernatural, and the miraculous, as well as with such qualities as chastity and modesty, Jaucourt's definitions evoke direct links to gendered religious practice, moral duty, and ultimately, spiritual communion.

Read in conjunction with the republican ideals of antiquity, the eighteenth-century model manifested itself in the so-called 'man of virtue,' who possessed integrity, independence, fidelity, sensibility, and civic responsibility, and who, as Marisa Linton observes, "took his familial obligations with the utmost seriousness, and was an exemplary father, son and husband."[333] Eighteenth-century virtue thus involved both a civic and a domestic component and each was integral into the realization of the other.

This interlocking relationship between political and domestic virtue echoes what eighteenth-century thinkers began to perceive as the complementary relationship between the sexes. Just as men were perceived to be naturally designed to lead public lives and women naturally formed for domestic existences dedicated to the care and raising of children and the maintenance of the family, the sexes were destined to embody similarly complementary understandings of virtue. This complementarity takes on immense importance in the work of Rousseau, who made virtue a central tenet of his political thought. For Rousseau, virtue was an all-encompassing endeavour in which the heroic masculine dignity of political virtue, paired with the modest generosity and demure feminine humility of domestic virtue,

---

[333] Marisa Linton, "Virtue Rewarded? Women and the politics of virtue in 18th-century France. Part I" *History of European Ideas* 26 (2000): 36.

was realized in the innate moral goodness of the child, who represented the hope and potential of the virtuous republican society.[334]

While the success of Rousseau's virtuous triumverate was wholly dependent upon the fortuitous alignment of the individual parts, Rousseau's virtuous polity placed an inordinate amount of power in women's hands. As corporeal entities, they were at once the linchpin of social reform and its weakest link. As the physical incubators of the republic of virtue they assumed full moral responsibility for human creation. Their bodies became public property, subject to the gaze of the patriarchal state. In the process, the female body was entirely reconceived: gendered Rousseauist virtue entailed, in Carol Blum's words: "the reabsorption of the sexually active woman into the lactating mother, [and] the substitution of a nutritive for a genital function."[335] The reproductive female body, appropriated to civic ends, enabled the practice of domestic feminine virtue. The message was clear: virtue, appropriately channelled, could transform society.[336]

Because virtue resided at the intersection between the public and domestic spheres, it was a difficult concept to categorize. Thinkers such as Rousseau imagined

---

[334] Carol Blum, *Rousseau and the Republic of Virtue: The Language of Politics in the French Revolution* (Ithaca, USA: Cornell University Press, 1986), 50.

[335] Carol Blum, *Rousseau and the Republic of Virtue*, 47. See also, Rousseau, *Emile*.

[336] This model of domestic virtue–presented in the form of the reproductive body and commandeered in the service of the state–is perhaps most convincingly portrayed in Rousseau's evocation of Julie d'Etanges, the heroine of his eponymous novel, *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse: lettres de deux amants habitants d'une petite ville au pied des Alpes*, 2 vols. (Paris: Le livre de poche, 2002). In *Julie*, Rousseau painted a picture of reclaimed virtue, presenting Julie as a woman whose renunciation of illicit and passionate love in favour of a relatively bland life of domestic duty reduced her liberty but increased her virtue. As Marisa Linton has observed: "[Julie] is transfigured: as wife, mother, friend, mistress of the household, and benefactress of the villagers, she generates sublime virtue all around her and becomes the emotional heart of the idyllic little community at Clarens" (Marisa Linton, "Virtue Rewarded? Women and the politics of virtue in 18th-century France. Part II" *History of European Ideas* 27 (2001): 55).

a direct correlation between the family and the state,[337] thus imbuing the private sphere with political import and the public with domestic sensibility, even as, paradoxically, the two realms became ever more separate and distinct from one another. This public/private divide highlights the contradictions inherent in the gendering of virtue. The performance of manly virtue, an essentially narcissistic endeavour, required the theatricality of the public stage and the concentrated gaze of the enlightened spectator. Womanly virtue, however, called for humility, modesty, sacrifice, and domesticity. It was, therefore, performed in the shadows.[338] The successful performance of womanly virtue depended on a careful negotiation of social and cultural conventions that otherwise limited and controlled women's experiences and behaviours.

Gendered understandings of virtue reinforced the social and cultural realities of the female condition during this period, and, on a philosophical level, complemented pre-existing theories of sexual difference. Feminine virtue encouraged piety, devotion, humility, and chastity and promised women, as domestic moral

---

[337] This theoretical linkage, as I suggested in the previous chapter, is also strongly Calvinist and ties in with Swiss understandings of community and nation.

[338] By this I mean to suggest that the successful practice of motherhood entailed woman's complete dedication to the domestic concerns of home and family, and, as a result, her absence from the public sphere. The idea of maternal absence is central to Deborah Steinberger's analysis of seventeenth-century French theatre. The lead character of Donneau de Visé's *L'Embarras de Godard, ou l'Accouchée* (1667), is a labouring mother who remains pointedly invisible throughout the play, the progress of her labour reported only through the voice of a maidservant. Nevertheless, she still manages to guide the action onstage, engineering her daughter's wished-for betrothal and thus ensuring her future happiness (Deborah Steinberger, "The Difficult Birth of the Good Mother: Donneau de Vise's *L'Embarras de Godard, ou l'Accouchee,*" in *Maternal Measures: Figuring Caregiving in the Early Modern Period*, eds. Naomi J. Miller and Naomi Yavneh [Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2000], 201-11).

guides, a leading role in social and cultural reform.[339] Just as the family was the foundation of the virtuous society, so too were women–as wives and mothers–the nucleus of the virtuous family.

This split between masculine public and feminine private virtue lies at the heart of Suzanne Necker's psychic malaise.[340] On the one hand, she fully adhered to the tenets of feminine virtue. All evidence suggests that she was committed to her home,[341] fully faithful to her husband,[342] and completely dedicated to her daughter.[343] Virtue is a common theme in her *Mélanges* and *Nouveaux Mélanges* and central to her correspondence with intimate friends. In addition to this, her piety and its concrete manifestation in the form of numerous charitable initiatives provide substantial proof of her concern for the moral and physical well being of others in her community. From this perspective, Suzanne Necker emerges as an innately virtuous being who fully merited the enthusiastic accolades of her contemporaries and subsequent biographers. From another perspective, however, she did not at all comply with the requirements of feminine virtue. On a public level, her role as

---

[339] See Rousseau's *Emile*, for example, which bequeaths to women the full responsibility for social reform. For a broader discussion about the role of women in Rousseauist social reform, see Nicole Fermon, who views Rousseau's social prescription as 'homeopathic' in that he defined women as both the source of social corruption and the locus for its cure. Nicole Fermon, *Domesticating Passions: Rousseau, Woman, and Nation* (Hanover, USA: Wesleyan University Press, 1997), 27.

[340] For more on this, see Dena Goodman, "Germaine de Staël's Dilemmas: Writing, Gender, and Publicity" (unpublished paper).

[341] See, for example, her "sept rapports," or obligations, through which she demonstrated her fidelity to God. Among others, these included duties towards her husband and daughter, as well as to "le ménage" (Haussonville, *Salon*, 2:5).

[342] "Vierge et pure, quand je fis le serment de t'être fidèle, j'ai tenu mon serment, dans toute sa délicatesse" (Quoted in Auguste de Staël, *Notice sur M. Necker* [Paris: Treuttel et Würtz, 1820], 329-30.)

[343] "Je passerai rapidement sur la suite continuelle des soins que j'ai donnés à ma fille, nourrice changée, sevrage, inoculation, régime, attention continuelle de jour et de nuit; sa taille, ses dents, ses cheveux, toutes les portions d'elle-même étoient suivies ou dressés ou perfectionnées: sa santé me sert de preuve....Pendant treize ans je ne l'ai presque pas perdue de vue" (Quoted in Andlau, *Jeunesse*, 47).

salonnière, while integral to elite sociability, was viewed by some as a fundamental transgression of the virtuous ideal and, as such, a subversion of the virtuous social order.[344] Her role in the area of hospital reform was similarly viewed with some suspicion,[345] even as the virtues she espoused fully conformed to gender conventions.[346]

Gendered eighteenth-century understandings of virtue left little room for feminine ambition or desire, and the transgressive woman, the object of public criticism, was disparaged by women and men alike.[347] The Marquise du Châtelet's decision to devote her life to intellectual accomplishment, for example, was met with discomfiture. "[E]lle a tant travaillé à paraître ce qu'elle n'était pas qu'on ne sait plus ce qu'elle est en effet,"observed Madame du Deffand in a satirical portrait of her colleague:

---

[344] Rousseau imagined the salon woman as an indolent creature whose very presence in the public sphere threatened heroic masculinity: "chaque femme de Paris rassemble dans son appartement un sérail d'hommes plus femmes qu'elle, qui savent rendre à la beauté toutes sortes d'hommages, hors celui du coeur dont elle est digne. Mais voyez ces mêmes hommes, toujours contraints dans ces prisons volontaires, se lever, se rasseoir, aller et venir sans cesse à la cheminée, à la fenêtre, prendre et poser cent fois un écran, feuilleter les livres, parcourir des tableaux, tourner, pirouetter par la chambre, tandis que l'idole, étendue sans mouvement dans sa chaise longue, n'a d'actif que la langue et les yeux" (Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Jean-Jacques Rousseau, citoyen de Genève, à M. d'Alembert," *Oeuvres complètes de J. J. Rousseau,* 25 vol. [Dalibon, 1826], 2:154-5).

[345] See, for example, the commentary of Joseph Weber, whose virulent critique accuses Madame Necker of political conspiracy designed with the sole purpose of agitating the lower classes against the supposed intransigence of the government. See Joseph Weber, *Mémoires de Weber, concernant Marie-Antoinette, archiduchesse d'Autriche et reine de France et de Navarre; avec des notes et des éclaircissemens historiques, par Mm. Berville et Barrière* (Paris, 1822), 270-2.

[346] François Doublet, the first resident doctor of the *Hospice de charité*, argued that the success of the hospice project was wholly dependent on the sex of the individuals involved: hospitals run by women were naturally superior to those run by men because, "la sobriété, qui est naturelle aux femmes, la douceur, la patience, la sensibilité et l'adresse qui font leur partage," provided incontrovertible proof of nature's intention; that is, for women to take care of the needs of the sick. See François Doublet, *Hospice de Charité, année 1788* (Paris: Imprimerie royale, 1789), 18.

[347] For an in-depth exploration of the nature of eighteenth-century female ambition, see Elisabeth Badinter, *Emilie, Emilie, ou l'ambition féminine au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Flammarion, 1983).

> Ses défauts mêmes ne lui sont peut-être pas naturels, ils pourraient tenir à ses prétentions; son impolitesse et son inconsidération, à l'état de princesse; sa sécheresse et ses distractions, à celui de savante; son rire glapissant, ses grimaces et ses contorsions, à celui de jolie femme.[348]

Just as Rousseau's salon woman threatened to undermine the fundamental principles of natural sexual difference, so too did the Marquise du Châtelet's intellectual ambitions subvert gendered understandings of social relations.

The tension between Suzanne Necker's apparent domestic virtue and her literary and social ambitions was equally controversial. The commentary of Madame de Genlis is particularly incisive:

> Une femme si chrétienne, une âme si élevée, devoit avoir naturellement de la modestie et de la sincérité; mais l'ambition démesurée d'une célébrité éclatante n'altéra que trop, à cet égard, son goût et son caractère. Pour obtenir des louanges, combien n'en a-t-elle pas prodigué à des ouvrages qu'elle n'aimait point, et à des hommes qu'elle ne pouvoit estimer![349]

More telling than the critiques of her contemporaries, however, were Madame Necker's internal struggles. She did not consider herself to be a virtuous being and her various writings attest to a strong sense of Calvinist culpability. She perceived her filial neglect and her desire for literary success as moral failures, instances of personal weakness which undermined her virtue. Continually chastising herself for activities left unfinished and obligations left incomplete,[350] she initiated an elaborate program of personal reform and dedicated herself to balance and control. Among her

---

[348] Friedrich Melchior, Freiherr von Grimm, *Correspondance, littéraire, philosophique et critique*, 16 vols. (Paris: Garnier frères, 1877), 11:436-37.

[349] Stéphanie Félicité Ducrest de Saint Aubin, Comtesse de Genlis, *De l'influence des femmes sur la littérature française, comme protectrices des lettres et comme auteurs; ou précis de l'histoire des femmes françaises les plus célèbres* (Paris: Maradin, 1811), 303.

[350] Haussonville, *Salon*, 2:5.

various activities in this regard was her *Journal de la dépense de mon temps*, in which she outlined, in detail, each of her obligations and the amount of time she could accord to them.[351] She also engaged in an extensive process of critical self-reflection,[352] crafting a rational life that accorded with the Calvinist principles of her youth. Judging from her various writings, however, these activities were to no avail, for she remained wholly unconvinced of her inherent worthiness or right to salvation.[353]

Much of Madame Necker's moral discouragement had to do with her definition of virtue and her understanding of its implications within society. Like her contemporaries, Madame Necker espoused an all-encompassing perspective, which included both the heroic qualities of masculine virtue and the gentleness, purity, and grace of feminine virtue. She observed, for example, that her husband's public virtue derived from a balance between his civic commitments as a leading actor in the French administration and the simple values of his childhood.[354] At the same time, she adhered to conventional understandings of feminine virtue, imagining womanly virtue as a hidden jewel carefully swathed in feminine humility:

> Heureuses les femmes qui ont su cacher long-tems leur mérite par la simplicité et la modestie, et qui ont appris leur secret au public avant de le savoir elles-mêmes! Heureuses celles qui ont su se faire aimer, avant de faire naître l'envie, et qui ont jugé de bonne heure que l'exemple donné en silence est le plus utile de tous![355]

---

[351] Haussonville, *Salon*, 2:5.

[352] For more on her self-reflection, see Dena Goodman, "Spectateur intérieur," 91-100; Soumoy-Thibert, "Idées," 357-68.

[353] "[J]e n'ai reconnu les vertus que pour me convaincre que je n'avois point." Suzanne Curchod Necker, Letter to Elie Salomon François Réverdil, "Paris le 30 9bre 1772," ms.suppl. 725, BGE.

[354] Curchod Necker, "Portrait de M. Necker," in *Mélanges*, 2:372-404.

[355] Curchod Necker, *Mélanges*, 1:377

Like Rousseau, she stressed the inherently practical nature of virtue, writing, "On aime plus la vertu quand on la pratique que quand on la peint."[356] But she also took these ideals further. Virtue, Necker believed, was intrinsic to spiritual salvation,[357] and therefore, directly linked to human happiness.[358] Within this framework, virtue emerged from the dedicated practice of one's duties,[359] a process through which one attained the pure happiness of spiritual communion. As a gift of the Supreme Being,[360] virtue was analogous to divine grace, and required a posture of humble obeisance and active sacrifice, acts of devotion which demonstrated one's selfless commitment to a greater good. "On ne se refroidit point sur ses devoirs en les multipliant," she argued, "cet exercice continuel de la vertu semble appeler plus souvent la présence divine, et donne ainsi aux petites choses un caractère de grandeur et une sort d'étendue."[361]

Suzanne Necker believed that the individual's journey towards virtue could be monitored through the practice of one's duties and the cultivation of an ordered inner environment. Self-control, which can be understood as the careful management of one's otherwise unruly passions and unseemly ambitions and desires, was fundamental to a life of virtue, enabling a constant and continual self-surveillance

---

[356] Curchod Necker, *Mélanges*, 1:266.

[357] See, for example, Curchod Necker, *Mélanges*, 1:88, where she links virtue directly with "piété, humanité, vertu...divinités."

[358] Curchod Necker, *Mélanges*, 2:21.

[359] Curchod Necker, *Mélanges*, 1:22.

[360] Madame Necker's use of the term "Être suprême" would appear, at least superficially, to accord with deist understandings of a divine presence (and later, with revolutionary spectacles). However, her frequent use of the more direct term, "Dieu,"and references to "l'Évangile," locate her firmly within the Calvinist tradition. See, for example: Suzanne Curchod Necker, Letter to Henriette Réverdil, 26 7bre 1776, ms.suppl. 717, BGE, where she invokes the gospel in response to a discussion about the unhappy marriage of one of Réverdil's sons.

[361] Curchod Necker, *Mélanges*, 1:284.

which challenged the individual to live up to the highest moral standards.[362] Self-control, she believed, enabled resistance to vice and a concentrated focus on duty, both of which would lead naturally to a life of moral purity. While suffering and struggle were integral to the quest for virtue, the honouring of one's duties was, in Suzanne Necker's words, "une jouissance,"[363] which offered transformative potential in the form of a true happiness that she equated with the experience of unencumbered spiritual communion.[364] "La vertu dépend de nos efforts, que l'Être suprême favorise toujours," she observed:

> elle nous donne l'espoir de rejoindre ceux qui ne vivent plus pour nous: l'accomplissement de tous nos devoirs augmente chaque jour la tendresse et l'estime des personnes que nous aimons; une ame toujours saine et un régime exact, fortifie la santé; et quand on obtiendroit la jeunesse, la beauté et les talens, il faudroit toujours les perdre par la vieillesse et par la mort. La vertu seule nous procure tous les dons joints à l'immortalité.[365]

Necker's reflections offer an abstract conceptualization of virtue's place within the spiritual framework. However, the reality of the human condition–the misery-laden experience of unchecked moral vice brought about by Original Sin–rendered Necker's theoretical formulations fundamentally unattainable at a practical level. In a Calvinist framework, to recall the previous chapter, all believers were

---

[362] See, for example, Curchod Necker, *Mélanges*, 1:364, where she writes: "Fixons donc notre attention sur ce travail secret que se fait en nous; nous apprendrons à mieux connoître l'agent qui y préside."

[363] Curchod Necker, *Mélanges*, 1:22.

[364] See Curchod Necker, *Mélanges*, 1:179, where she writes: "la vertu est [le secret] du bonheur," and later in the same volume: "l'amour divin fait le bonheur de l'homme" (1:216).

[365] Curchod Necker, *Mélanges*, 3:60.

sinners who actively participated in their own downfall by their indiscriminate actions.[366]

Within the Lutheran tradition, such a rupture was recuperable.[367] Within the Calvinist faith, however, such a project was fundamentally impossible to realize. The five principles of the Calvinist faith outlined the believer's position of absolute and irrevocable sin and confirmed that God alone had the power to bestow salvation on select members of his flock.[368]

The dictates of Calvinist theology suggest that within this system, Madame Necker's moral struggle was fundamentally insurmountable. Unlike Rousseau, who argued for the innate goodness of the individual and set the stage for redemption, Madame Necker did not believe that virtue, once lost, could be recovered. While she fully acknowledged Rousseau as a leading propagator of virtue,[369] she remained, nevertheless, entirely unconvinced by his vision of virtue as embodied in the character of Julie d'Etanges. Julie was not a moral being, Necker argued, because she established her virtue on a foundation of vice.[370] Julie's only virtue emerged from

---

[366] See, for example, the first article of the Synod of Dort, which states, in part that: "Forasmuch as all men haved sinned in *Adam*, and are become guiltie of the curse, and eternall death, God had done wrong unto no man, if it had pleased him to leave all mankind in sin, and under the curse, and to condemne them for sinne." *The iudgement of the synode holden at Dort, concerning the fiue Articles* (London: John Bill, 1619), 3.

[367] Martin Luther preached salvation by faith alone.

[368] "But whereas in the processe of time, God bestoweth faith on some, and not on others, this procedes from his eternall decree." (*The iudgement of the synode holden at Dort, concerning the fiue Articles* [London: John Bill, 1619], 4). The Synod of Dort took place in Dordrecht in 1618-19. Convened as a result of the perceived threats and incursions of Arminianism into the Dutch Reformed church, it included the participation of reformed leaders from The Netherlands, Britain, Switzerland, and Geneva.

[369] Curchod Necker, *Mélanges*, 1:148.

[370] Curchod Necker, *Mélanges*, 3:105. See also Curchod Necker, *Mélanges* 1:59: "Je ne crois pas pouvoir trop le répéter, ce mélange du vice et de la vertu est extrêment dangereux; il embellit le vice et diminue les charmes de la vertu."

her recognition of her moral weaknesses, but even this was partial and could never lead to true happiness.

Necker's belief in the absolute purity of virtue, such that it was a quality that could not be recovered after an initial instance of moral weakness or failure, is essential to understanding her life.[371] This belief lies at the heart of her relationship with her mother, directly informs the one she later developed with her daughter, and underpins her performance of maternal abjection. In particular, it sheds more light into the conflicted relationship between her literary ambitions and her maternal duty and paves the way for understanding how she may have perceived the troubling slippage between her roles as *salonnière* and mother.

While such an internal struggle might be considered characteristic of the Calvinist condition, I would suggest that the case of Suzanne Necker offers an extreme example, particularly as it played itself out within the maternal body, the intimate corporeal space in which divine potential–through the act of creation–encountered human fallibility and desire. In a very real sense, the maternal body symbolizes the irredeemability of Original Sin: each act of divine creation engendered a concomitant act of sin, such that divine grace, once lost, was fundamentally irredeemable.

---

[371] Recall, here, the exile occasioned by the sinful actions of Adam and Eve. While they were born in grace and thus embodied virtue, Calvin argued that their fall as a result of Original Sin doomed their descendants to endless wandering and an eternal quest for salvation.

Virtue and the Good Mother

On the evening of 18 April 1766, Suzanne finished a letter to her close friend Etienette Clavel de Brenles, as cited earlier. "Permettez Madame que je finisse en vous assurant de mon plus tendre attachement," she wrote:

> ce sera la dernière lettre que j'aurai l'honneur de vous écrire avant que j'ai doublé mon être ou pour meux dire avant que j'aye mis au jour un nouveau coeur pour vous aimer; je sens que mon enfant doit avoir les sentiments de sa mére.[372]

Madame Necker was right. Her daughter, Anne-Louise-Germaine was born just four days later, on 22 April 1766.

Madame Necker described her long and gruelling labour in her next letter to Madame de Brenles. Drawing on religious and mythological imagery, she evoked a hellish experience which exceeded even the tormented visions conjured by her imagination. Over a period of three days and two nights, she suffered "les tourmens des damnés."[373] Watched over by her *accoucheurs*, or male-midwives, "une espèce de gens bien plus terribles que les furies, inventés exprès pour faire frémir la pudeur et révolter la nature,"[374] she suffered in near mortal agony until the arrival of a woman midwife.

Madame Necker's direct corporeal encounter with abjection–her sense of fear and revulsion during her birth experience–offers a concrete example of Calvinist beliefs about the maternal body. While on a symbolic level, as outlined previously, the

---

[372] Curchod Necker, Letter to Etienette Clavel de Brenles, Paris, Avril 1766, IS1915/xxx/h/1, BCUL; See also Golowkin, *Lettres diverses*, 290-91.

[373] Curchod Necker, Letter to Etienette Clavel de Brenles, Paris le 11 juin 1766, IS1915/xxx/h/1, BCUL; See also Golowkin, *Lettres diverses*, 292.

[374] Curchod Necker, Letter to Etienette Clavel de Brenles, Paris le 11 juin 1766, IS1915/xxx/h/1, BCUL; See also Golowkin, *Lettres diverses*, 292.

mother embodied the social and civic ideals of the Calvinist faith through her role as the propagator of social and moral values, her corporeal existence was far more complex.

Within Calvinist belief, the human body, by its physical presence, was inherently defiled; in Calvin's words, it represented "the sorry spectacle of our foulness and dishonor" which stood in marked contrast to the act of creation itself.[375] Calvin reminded his faithful that while they were born blessed by grace, they had, as a result of Original Sin, descended into corruption: "Nous confessons et nous recongnoissons sans feinctise, deuant ta saincte maiesté, que nous sommes paoures pecheurs, conceuez et nez en iniquité et corruption: enlins à mal faire, inutiles à tout bien."[376]

The slippage between creation and defilement is particularly discernible in the relationship between two very distinct Calvinist understandings of the verb *naître*, or birth. Early Calvinist theology associated *naître* with defilement, that is, with the physical entry of the individual into a human world of pain and suffering. *Naître* could also be seen as the opportunity for spiritual rebirth; in other words, as a condition for entry into communion with God. This dual relationship is exemplified in the Calvinist baptismal liturgy dating from 1542. Here, the believer acknowledged that human birth was both an entry into sin and a site of redemptive potential: "Notre Seigneur nous monstre, en quelle paoureté et misere nous naissons tous, en nous disant, qu'il nous fault renaistre."[377] The 1724 baptismal liturgy clarified this second point further

---

[375] Calvin, *Institutes*, 1:242.

[376] "Confession des péchés (1542)" in Pitassi, *Orthodoxie aux Lumières*, 60.

[377] "Liturgie du baptême (1542)" in Pitassi, *Orthodoxie aux Lumières*, 60.

by observing the direct relationship between spiritual rebirth and membership in God's kingdom: "nous devons naître de nouveau, si nous voulons entrer dans le Royaume de Dieu."[378]

These doctrines had profound implications for women, whose reproductive bodies and obligations were located at the intersection between oppositional and competing understandings of birth. Suzanne Necker's filial–and later, maternal–experiences epitomized this paradox. Madame Necker was tied to the duties she owed to the memory of her dead mother, obligations which required her to extend her maternal inheritance through her own mothering practices. Caught between the roles of mother and daughter, and fully cognizant of the complex and contradictory nature of the reproductive body, Madame Necker experienced the exile of the abject, a space which was at once deeply desired and greatly feared.

The often-troubled relationship between mothers and daughters has been the subject of numerous theoretical studies. Most hard-hitting, perhaps, are the ruminations of Simone de Beauvoir.[379] Beauvoir conceives the mother as an essentially antagonistic and competitive being who perceives her daughter as a blank canvas upon which she imprints both her narcissistic desire and her innate resentment. The daughter, as maternal double, realizes her mother's aspirations even as she confirms her mother's abjection, a cycle reiterated through each passing generation. Beauvoir founds her analysis upon a perspective of female corporeality as limiting; in other words, she understands the reproductive body as a prison which denies women's possibilities for self-realization. Alternately figured by Beauvoir as

---

[378] "Liturgie du baptême (1724)" in Pitassi, *'Orthodoxie aux Lumières*, 60.
[379] Beauvoir, *Second Sex*.

the cave, abyss, or hell,[380] the female body represents the antithesis of the creative, intellectual endeavours that have shaped culture and society.

Other work on the relationship between women and the reproductive body, however, has posited a more felicitous encounter. Theorists such as Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous, and Iris Marion Young posit a subversive corporeal alterity, suggesting that women's 'other-ness' might actually be conducive to new and radical forms of conceptualization.[381] Cixousian "white ink,"[382] read together with Irigaray's "corps-à-corps avec la mère"[383] and Young's "pregnant embodiment"[384] offer insights into the seductive and transformative nature of the abject reproductive body. Within such a formulation, the inherent defilement of birth is re-inscribed, so that the essential fluidity of birth is always, necessarily, a creative, communitarian act. As Kristeva observes: "By giving birth, the woman enters into contact with her

---

[380] Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, 179.

[381] Hélène Cixous, "Le rire de la méduse," *L'Arc* (1975): 39-54; Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca, USA: Cornell University Press, 1985); Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982); Julia Kristeva, "Motherhood [according to Giovanni Bellini]." In *French Feminism Reader*, Ed. Kelly Oliver (Lanham, USA and Oxford, UK: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000), 176-80.

[382] "Même si la mystification phallique a contaminé généralement les bons rapports, la femme n'est jamais loin de la 'mère'....Toujours en elle subsiste au moins un peu du bon lait-de-mère. Elle écrit à l'encre blanche" (Cixous, "Rire," 44).

[383] Irigaray's conceptualization inverts the dark horror of the Platonic cave by envisioning instead the creative wonder and seductive volatility of the womb: "It is also necessary for us to discover and assert that we are always mothers once we are women. We bring something other than children into the world, we engender something other than children: love, desire, language, art, the social, the political, the religious, for example. But this creation has been forbidden us for centuries, and we must reappropriate this maternal dimension that belongs to us as women" (Luce Irigaray, "The Bodily Encounter with the Mother," in *The Irigaray Reader*, ed. Margaret Whitford, trans. David Macey [Oxford, UK and Cambridge, USA: Basil Blackwell, 1991], 43).

[384] "Pregnancy...reveals a paradigm of bodily experience in which the transparent unity of self dissolves and the body attends positively to itself at the same time that it enacts its projects" Iris Marion Young, *On Female Body Experience: "Throwing Like a Girl" and Other Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 47. In Young's approach, women are at all times both subject and object.

mother; she becomes, she is her own mother; they are the same continuity differentiating itself."[385]

Suzanne Necker's experiences of mother- and daughter- hood suggest an interplay between defilement and creation. While she was deeply aware of her maternal inheritance and conscious of her responsibilities to the furtherance of her filial obligations, Necker was also drawn to the intimacy and fluidity–the sensual promise–of the mother/daughter relationship. The relationships she imagined and cultivated with her mother, on the one hand, and her daughter, on the other, present opportunities to examine more closely the tensions and interactions within the mother/daughter bond as they manifested themselves in an eighteenth-century maternal life.

Mon Ange Tutélaire: Refracting the Maternal Mirror

Very little physical evidence remains of Suzanne Necker's relationship to her mother, Magdeleine Curchod, née Albert. As a result, Magdeleine's direct influence on her daughter is difficult to discern. Biographers such as Haussonville have pointed to Madame Curchod's physical attributes as the source of her daughter's beauty,[386] but offer little insight into her further influence and impact on Madame Necker's life. Madame Curchod's correspondence, of which only a small amount remains, suggests limited exposure to formal education, and would therefore appear to confirm the generally held view that Suzanne's father was almost entirely responsible for her intellectual development. The following is clear: Magdeleine Curchod was almost

[385] Julia Kristeva, "Motherhood," 178.
[386] Haussonville, *Salon*, 1:15.

forty years old when she gave birth to her only child, Louise Suzanne, on 2 June 1737. She died after an extended illness in 1763, at the age of 65, leaving a distraught daughter who was seemingly never able to recover from her loss. Suzanne Curchod, twenty-six years old at the time, entered into an extended period of profound corporeal suffering which was to affect the rest of her life.[387]

Suzanne's corporeal manifestation of maternal loss offers one tangible instance of her mother's influence on her life. Her correspondence with Swiss friends, in particular Henriette Réverdil, offers further insights. Here, Magdeleine Curchod emerges as her daughter's moral conscience, a woman who educated her daughter into the forms and conventions of the Calvinist tradition, instilling in her an understanding of the obligations and duties required of a woman of faith and piety. Unfortunately, Magdeleine Curchod's death interrupted this process, leaving her daughter's moral education incomplete and her maternal legacy unfulfilled.[388] This rupture was to haunt Suzanne. Not only did she find herself without the maternal support so integral to the furtherance of the Calvinist maternal tradition, but she also

---

[387] There is strong evidence to support this. According to her doctor, Théodore Tronchin, her extended maladies developed as a direct result of the period of near-hysterical mourning after the death of Magdeleine Curchod (Haussonville, *Salon*, 2:287). In addition to this, Madame Necker herself attributes her various sufferings to the death of her mother. See, for example: Suzanne Curchod Necker, Letter to Henriette Réverdil, 25 juin 1768, ms.suppl. 717, BGE, where she writes: "la mort de ma mére a altéré ma santé d'une maniére irréparable." Necker's close friend Antoine-Léonard Thomas linked her illnesses to her desire to save the world (Thomas, *Oeuvres complètes*, 6:264-65). This desire, Madame Necker confessed in letters to Madame Réverdil, was directly tied to the duties she owed to the memory of her dead mother (Curchod Necker, Letter to Henriette Réverdil, undated [1765] and 26 7bre 1776, ms.suppl. 717, BGE).

[388] While Suzanne Curchod was twenty-six at the time of her mother's death, she was still unmarried and living at home, and thus, directly under her mother's care and guidance. Contrast her experience of rupture, for example, with that of her daughter, Germaine, who, on the day of her marriage, penned a 'leave-taking' letter to her mother, in which she paid homage, as a daughter, to her maternal inheritance even as she took on new roles as wife and future mother. (Staël, *Correspondance générale*, 1:58-59).

felt morally adrift, orphaned by the one person whose moral goodness formed the backbone of her existence.[389]

I would suggest, however, that Magdeleine Curchod's death had an even more devastating impact on Suzanne's life and thought processes. In later years, Suzanne Necker was to express a sense of profound culpability with regard to her mother's final illness and subsequent death.[390] In particular, she believed that her personal ambitions and desires were the cause of her mother's death, and lamented the moral weakness which caused her to neglect her filial duties towards her mother. It was a fundamental–and to Madame Necker's mind irredeemable–breach of virtue.

Necker expressed her profound sense of culpability in numerous letters, among them, an extended soliloquy addressed to her mother seventeen years after her death:

> En vain je voudrois confier mes peines: qui m'entendra? Je cherche à te rappeller dans l'illusion du sommeil, je crois te voir, je te parle; mon âme s'épanche dans ton sein; le sein d'une mère, où est-il?....oh! ma mère, ne rejette pas ton enfant; il a été coupable envers toi, mais combien peu de temps et que de larmes, que de tendresse, que de sentiments, que de transports ont racheté ces instants d'humeur!....et pendant ces trois années encore où mon caractère s'était altéré, je n'ai pas cessé un instant de t'adorer; pardonne donc, fais grâce; l'Être suprême pardonne à ceux qui l'ont offensé. Dix-sept ans de remords dévorants n'ont-ils point expié mes fautes? Vois ces larmes que je répands par torrents, reçois ton enfant, ne l'éloigne pas de toi, il implore ta pitié...[391]

---

[389] While Madame Necker makes mention of the deaths of both parents and notes that her father gave up his health for her, her frequent invocations of her (neglected) duties toward her mother suggests that the maternal link was stronger than the one she shared with her father.

[390] See, for example, Haussonville, *Salon*, 2:5.

[391] Haussonville, *Salon*, 1:87-88. Necker refers here to the three years between the death of her father and mother.

Necker's moral suffering is palpable. In this letter, she is acutely aware of the void left by her mother's death and desperate to bridge the chasm that separated the two of them. In addition to this, she is deeply conscious of her personal failures and of their impact on her mother's final years. Necker expressed similar thoughts in a 1770 letter to her close childhood friend, Elie-Salomon-François Réverdil, then working as a tutor in the Danish court. "[Q]ue vous êtes heureux Monsieur d'embelir comme vous le faites la vie d'une mére respectable," she wrote:

> j'adorois la mienne; et je n'ai pû dans sa vieillesse lui donner que des larmes et des regrets; sans ce souvenir toûjours poignant mon sort serait si doux qu'il ne s'écouleroit pas un jour sans me laisser le regret de sa perte et l'espoir du lendemain.[392]

So it was, then, that from the moment of her mother's death, Suzanne Necker dedicated herself fully to the ultimately futile task of recovering her lost virtue. Cultivating an active relationship with her mother's memory, thus ensuring Magdeleine Curchod's continuing moral presence in her life, she transformed filial duties into spiritual duties.[393] Madame Necker's commitment to the principles of her faith was, in this sense, as much a demonstration of her devotion to her mother's memory as it was to the Calvinist tradition in the abstract. "Dieu veuille bénir nos soins," she wrote to a close friend, "il me semble que ma chére mére les approuve du haut des cieux; et que j'oserai me présenter devant elle au moment ou je la rejoindrai."[394] The memory of her dead mother, representative of all that Madame

---

[392] Curchod Necker, Letter to Elie-Salomon-François Réverdil, ce 23 mars 1770, ms.suppl. 725, BGE. See also her letter dated 13 February 1779, in which she reflects on the void left by the death of Henriette Réverdil: "Puissiez vous Monsieur jouir de toutes les bénédictions que le ciel répand sur les enfants qui ont fait le bonheur de leur mére" (ms.suppl. 725, BGE).

[393] "Puisse-t-elle voir du haut des cieux mon coeur enflamé encore du désir de lui plaire." Curchod Necker, Letter to Sophie Réverdil, undated [1765], ms.suppl. 717, BGE.

[394] Curchod Necker, Letter to Henriette Réverdil, undated, ms.suppl. 717, BGE.

Necker had lost–her virtue,[395] her moral support, and finally, her nation–embodies the Calvinist experiences of abjection, exile, longing, and *patrie*.

Magdeleine Curchod's close friend Henriette Réverdil played a key role in this process. As the mirror upon which Suzanne Necker projected her maternal longing, Réverdil functioned as a maternal surrogate, becoming Suzanne Necker's moral guide, spiritual confessor, advisor, and counsellor–the woman most suitable to take up the position vacated by Magdeleine Curchod. She acted as a maternal presence with whom Madame Necker was able to share her personal experiences and her deep and intense desire for maternal communion.[396]

Suzanne Necker's letters to Henriette Réverdil, seventy-nine of which are housed in the Bibliothèque publique de Genève, reveal the extent of her filial guilt towards her mother. In them, Necker writes with a candour that is otherwise rare in her correspondence, sharing with Réverdil her deepest desires and fears. These are personal letters in which the events and personalities of elite Parisian social life make very little appearance. Indeed, since these letters are, at times, almost painfully intimate, they offer revealing insights into the nature of the mother/daughter relationship as Suzanne Necker imagined it.

Henriette Réverdil, the wife of Urbain Réverdil, a public official in the Vaudois village of Nyon, was the mother of seven children,[397] two of whom–Elizabeth Sophie

---

[395] With regard to her filial resentment and neglect during her mother's final illness.

[396] "vous ignorez peutêtre tout ce que je dois à mdme votre mére, et a mdme votre soeur, elles m'ont recherchées dans mes plus grands malheurs et ne m'ont point abandonnée dans la prospérité." Curchod Necker, Letter to Elie-Salomon-François Réverdil, Paris le 30 9bre 1772, ms.suppl. 725, BGE.

[397] The research of E. William Monter suggests that the Réverdil family was unusually large by eighteenth-century Genevan standards (E. William Monter, "Women in Calvinist Geneva (1550-1800), *Signs* 6.2 [1980]: 189-209).

Salomé (1737-1806) and Elie-Salomon-François (1732-1808)–remained close friends with Suzanne Necker throughout her life.[398] Réverdil had known Suzanne since childhood and was, as Suzanne Necker points out, the model mother and friend: "mère de famille dans toute l'étendue du terme, mère de tous les malheureux; exemple continuel des vertus les plus respectables; amie incomparable."[399] In addition to this, she possessed consistent moral fortitude, keen discernment, and astute powers of observation, skills eminently useful in judging not only the moral aptitude of Suzanne Necker's needy relatives and friends, but also Necker's own fidelity and rectitude. Réverdil had high moral expectations for her best friend's daughter and it is clear that Suzanne Necker wanted to live up to them.[400]

Necker welcomed this transformation from family friend to maternal surrogate and regularly invoked the filial nature of her relationship with Réverdil. Most striking, in this regard, is a letter dated 3 Novernber 1765, in which Suzanne Necker, suffering from one of her interminable illnesses, employed the assistance of a scribe, in this instance, none other than Madame Réverdil's son, Marc-Louis Réverdil.[401] By 'writing' a letter ultimately penned by a biological child, Suzanne superimposed the hereditary power of the biological relationship over the emotional pull of her adoptive connection, thus further strengthening the filial bond between herself and the Réverdil family.

---

[398] Henriette Réverdil, *née* Merseille (1705-1779) married Urbain Réverdil in 1729. Her seven children were born between 1730 and 1749. She maintained an active correspondence with Suzanne Necker until her death.

[399] Curchod Necker, Letter to Henriette Réverdil, 12 mars 1771, ms.suppl. 717, BGE.

[400] See, for example, Curchod Necker, Letter to Henriette Réverdil, 15 xbre 1777, ms.suppl. 717, BGE.

[401] Curchod Necker, Letter to Henriette Réverdil, in the handwriting of Marc-Louis Réverdil, ce 3 novembre 1765, ms.suppl. 717, BGE.

As the embodiment of Ami Lullin's Calvinist maternal ideal, Réverdil offered a concrete example for Suzanne to follow. She was not only a model of grace, piety, nobility, and eloquent truth, but also a woman whose generosity, moral clarity, and active *bienfaisance* coalesced in the form of a maternal ideal without parallel.[402] Réverdil's presence in Suzanne Necker's life served as a moral anchor to which Necker could cling during periods of inner turmoil, and her example functioned as a beacon of hope in an otherwise morally corrupt society. "Votre lettre m'a touchée sensiblement," wrote Madame Necker:

> j'y vois une ame encor douloureusement affectée; mais que les plus sublimes vertus élevent au dessus de ses peines; pour ce qui me concerne j'y vois une bonté inestimable et infatigable toutes vos expressions tous vos sentiments me rappellent ces natures angeliques dont je ne vois plus ici ny les modeles ny même limage.[403]

Indeed, Réverdil acted as Necker's counsellor, and Suzanne regularly sought her advice on a variety of issues and deferred to her opinions. During her pregnancy, for example, Madame Necker expressed her desire to breastfeed her child and linked this with advice proffered by Madame Réverdil: "Je suivrai vos conseils Madame je ne m'obstinerai point contre la nature cependant j'ai lieu de me flatter qu'elle me sera favorable comme en nourrissant je ne cherche qu'a macquitter de mon devoir, ce seroit aller à contre fins si je nuisois à mon enfant."[404]

In addition to this, Réverdil acted as Necker's confessor, a woman to whom she turned when she needed to share the most intimate aspects of her being. As Suzanne stressed, "Vous êtes Madame la confidente de ma situation et de mes

---

[402] Curchod Necker, Letter to Henriette Réverdil, 21 4bre [1771], ms.suppl. 717, BGE.
[403] Curchod Necker, Letter to Henriette Réverdil, ce 17 juin 1773, ms.suppl. 717, BGE.
[404] Curchod Necker, Letter to Henriette Réverdil, undated, ms.suppl. 717, BGE.

devoirs secrets."[405] It was to Réverdil that Necker confided her fundamental unhappiness, even in the face of great wealth,[406] and Réverdil, too, who acted as witness to her continuing feelings of sorrow and failure with regard to her mother.[407]

But Réverdil also played another, more profound role in Necker's life. Her presence enabled Madame Necker to keep her mother's memory alive: "C'est dans votre lettre seule que je retrouve le souvenir d'une mére adorée et l'image de sa vertu."[408] As the guardian of the memory of Magdeleine Curchod, Réverdil was the mirror through which Necker recalled her aborted relationship with her own mother and upon which she could re-inscribe her filial duty. Taking a submissive posture, she inhabited the position of the dutiful daughter, using the reflected glory of the maternal surrogate to illuminate her own filial performance. Suzanne Necker's filial claim to Madame Réverdil, which imposed a series of obligations and duties to which Suzanne, as 'daughter,' was obliged to submit, can be read as a rewriting of filial negligence in the language of daughterly virtue. In this sense, Réverdil can be seen as a conduit who enabled her to fulfil her responsibilities to the memory of her mother: "Permettez moi donc de vous dire Madame qu'à l'aide de vos soins je crois avoir rempli bien au de là la volonté de ma digne mère; et par lâ tous mes devoirs."[409]

Suzanne Necker's relationship with Réverdil strengthened her bonds to her religion, culture, and national identity, so that the maternal act, imagined through the

---

[405] Curchod Necker, Letter to Henriette Réverdil, 15 juillet 1766, ms.suppl. 717 BGE.

[406] Curchod Necker, Letter to Henriette Réverdil, Paris 16 juin 1771, ms.suppl. 717 BGE.

[407] See also Suzanne Necker's letter to Elie-Salomon-François in which she wrote: "dèz que jai cessé de souffrir et dont je n'ai reconnu les vertus que pour me convaincre que je n'avois point" (Suzanne Curchod Necker, Letter to Elie-Salomon-François Réverdil, Paris ce 30 9bre 1772, ms.supp. 725, BGE).

[408] Curchod Necker, Letter to Henriette Réverdil, 12 mars 1771, ms.suppl. 717 BGE.

[409] Curchod Necker, Letter to Henriette Réverdil, 26 7bre 1776, ms.suppl. 717 BGE.

memory of Magdeleine Curchod and embodied in the physical and epistolary presence of Henriette Réverdil, took on transformative power. Indeed, Suzanne's intimate correspondence with Henriette Réverdil anchored her to her Swiss Calvinist heritage, even as she felt herself seduced by the delights of Parisian cultural and intellectual life.

The Réverdil mirror also performed a darker function. While it made it possible for Suzanne to begin to re-imagine her relationship with her mother, it also forced her to confront the horror and pain of her loss. Through Madame Réverdil, she continually replayed that moment of rupture, the point of absolute abjection that changed the course of her life. "J'ai pour la mémoire de mon pére le même respect que pour celle de ma mére; et je les confonds tous les deux dans mon coeur, quoique avec un sentiment different," she observed, "l'un est un souvenir doux qui me retrace des vertus sans tâche, et qui me console dans les peines de la vie; l'autre me rappelle une perte irréparable et ne se présente à moi que pour me faire éprouver des déchirements."[410] Madame Réverdil's presence recalled her failed filial responsibility. Even as Necker attempted to re-inscribe her filial identity, she was faced with a heightened awareness of her negligence and the reality of fundamental and irredeemable loss. No matter how hard she tried to recover her mother's grace, the project was ultimately futile. In a blunt assessment of her situation, she noted that "quand je ne fais pas assez je crois entendre l'ame de ma chére mére qui se plaint de ma négligence."[411]

---

[410] Curchod Necker, Letter to Henriette Réverdil, 21 7bre 1771, ms.suppl. 717 BGE.
[411] Curchod Necker, Letter to Henriette Réverdil, 9 mars 1767, ms.suppl. 717 BGE.

But what was 'enough'? Necker's correspondence with Réverdil provides substantial evidence of her commitment to her mother's final wishes and her ardent desire to reclaim the essential virtue of her filial inheritance. Madame Necker's inability to resolve the profound rupture that accompanied her mother's death, however, seems to point to a self-imposed awareness of failure, a belief in her inherent unworthiness to claim the maternal legacy.

This futile quest for virtue played itself out in the context of the relationship that Suzanne developed with her daughter, Germaine. The long shadow of maternal memory loomed over this relationship, even as it represented Necker's only opportunity to recover her mother's memory and recuperate her filial virtue. In order to more fully comprehend the nature of Necker's maternal practice, I turn to a discussion of the maternal ideal as it was understood in France during the eighteenth century.

Eighteenth-century feminine virtue was realized in the form of the mother, as an idealized construct that embodied the promise and potential of the virtuous society. Elisabeth Badinter suggests that a sea change in philosophical, medical, and public opinion took place sometime during the last third of the eighteenth century. In particular, she notes the emergence of a naturalized maternal instinct, what she refers to as "the spontaneous love of all mothers for their children."[412] This new approach, propagated through a myriad of conduct books, philosophical essays, novels, and medical treatises, inculcated mothers into a language and culture of

---

[412] Elisabeth Badinter, *The Myth of Motherhood: An Historical View of the Maternal Instinct*, trans. Roger De Garis, 1980 (London, UK: Souvenir Press, 1981), 117.

obligation, duty, and guilt.[413] Writers and commentators naturalized duty and obligation by introducing the language of instinct, thus suggesting that maternity and motherhood–the realization of women's duties to the family, the nation and the species–conformed to the laws of nature and were, therefore, intrinsic to the female condition.[414] These writers suggested further that this natural instinct manifested itself in love. Together, these three ideas–nature, instinct, and love–formed the basis for a revolutionary understanding of the maternal imperative and laid the groundwork for a radical reconceptualization of French social relations.[415]

Motherhood and maternal practice were among the central preoccupations of Enlightenment philosophers, moralists, and thinkers. French society was in crisis. The excessive behaviours of the aristocratic class, combined with fears of depopulation, and dwindling political power on the international front, set the stage for a significant reformulation of the maternal ideal.[416] Rousseau's radical domesticity defined women as the prime nurturers of the family, and ultimately of society as a whole. Where society had once depended on the powerful father figure embodied in the

---

[413] See Isabelle Brouard-Arends, *Vies et images maternelles dans la littérature du dix-huitième siècle* Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation, 1991; Isabelle Brouard-Arends, "Entre nature et histoire: dire la maternité au siècle des Lumières," in *Sexualité, mariage et famille au XVIIIe siècle*, eds. Olga B. Cragg and Rosena Davison (Montréal, Canada: Les presses de l'université Laval, 1998), 233-39; Jennifer J. Popiel, "Making Mothers: The Advice Genre and the Domestic Ideal, 1760-1830," *Journal of Family History* 29.4 (2004): 339-50; Carol Duncan, "Happy Mothers and Other New Ideas in French Art," *Art Bulletin* 55 (1973): 570-83; Margaret H. Darrow, "French Noblewomen and the New Domesticity," *Feminist Studies* 5 (1979).

[414] Badinter, *Myth*, 148.

[415] For more insight into the maternal iconography of the French Revolution, for example, see Mary Jacobus, "Incorruptible Milk: Breast-feeding and the French Revolution," in *Rebel Daughters: Women and the French Revolution*, eds. Sara E. Melzer and Leslie W. Rabine (New York, USA: Oxford University Press, 1992), 54-75.

[416] For an in-depth look at eighteenth-century French perceptions of depopulation, see Carol Blum, *Strength in Numbers: Population, Reproduction, and Power in Eighteenth-Century France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).

form of the king and church, it now turned to a less visible figure, the mother, and in particular the good mother, as its hope for the future.

Within the new Rousseauist maternal polity, women-as-mothers took on central roles. Responsible for care, nurturing, and moral education, they were the cornerstones of a new society founded upon the principles of virtue. *La bonne mère* emerged as a vanquishing heroine, an ideological construct poised at once to reverse the worrying trends in depopulation, and, at the same time, to transform social mores. Within her body resided the promise and potential of the French nation. The *Encyclopédie* article on the mother offers a revealing portrait and identifies two distinct, but directly related facets of the maternal ideal.[417] The ideal mother existed both as a moral construct and, more importantly, as a physical being. Her first duty, contended Boucher d'Argis, was to nurse her children. These two ideas interrogated and intersected with one another, collapsing into the meta-construct that loomed large over eighteenth-century thought and practice.

****

Suzanne Curchod Necker was impatient to have children after her marriage. Pregnancy did not, however, come easily. After eight months of marriage she was still not pregnant, a situation which caused her some distress.[418] She worried she would be unable to provide her husband with an heir, and that as a consequence, she would find herself incapable of fulfilling a fundamental tenet of Christian marriage.

---

[417] Boucher d'Argis, "Mère, s. f. (*Jurisprud.*)," *Encyclopedie* 10:379.

[418] Andlau, *Jeunesse*, 17.

Within a few months, however, she became pregnant with her first and only child, a daughter, Anne-Louise-Germaine Necker, nicknamed Minette.

As a pious and erudite woman, Madame Necker was fully implicated in the maternal debates of her day. Her experiences as both daughter and mother reflected the tensions inherent in eighteenth-century understandings of maternal virtue and powerfully shaped her autobiographical understandings and presentations. Both her writings and actions demonstrate that she was determined to be a good mother to her child.

Central to the fulfilment of her maternal duty was maternal breastfeeding, a responsibility that she had already acknowledged during her pregnancy,[419] and to which she wholeheartedly dedicated herself upon her daughter's birth: "Je nourris moi-même, et malgré vos soupçons, c'est avec un grand succès."[420] The decision to nurse her child fully conformed to emerging medical and moral prescriptions and directives. The reproductive body came under intense scrutiny during the eighteenth century. Women, while natural nurturers and caregivers, were equally conceived as dangerous entities, whose moral weakness and emotional instability threatened the physical existence and moral development of foetus, infant, and child.[421] These conflicts played themselves out most notably in the space of the female breast,

---

[419] "Je suivrai vos conseils Madame je ne m'obstinerai point contre la nature cependant j'ai lieu de me flatter qu'elle me sera favorable comme en nourrissant je ne cherche qu'a macquitter de mon devoir, ce seroit aller à contre fins si je nuisois à mon enfant." Curchod Necker, Letter to Henriette Réverdil, undated, Ms.suppl. 717, BGE.

[420] Curchod Necker, Letter to Etienette Clavel de Brenles, Paris le 11 juin 1766, IS1915/xxx/h/1, BCUL. For more on Suzanne Necker's experiences with breastfeeding, see Madelyn Gutwirth, "Suzanne Necker's Legacy: Breastfeeding as Metonym in Germaine de Staël's Delphine," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 18.2 (2004): 17-40.

[421] For more on this subject, see Marie-Hélène Huet, *Monstrous Imagination* (Cambridge, USA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

which came to embody the idealized concerns of the nation.[422] At once the site of woman's sensual appeal (and thus, the location of dangerous, threatening, and potentially all-consuming desire), women's breasts also symbolized the potential for human life and growth.[423] Good mothering practice resided in the breasts: milk, as the source of national, religious, and cultural identity, flowed through them, thus linking mother to infant and infant to nation. Indeed, breasts were the conduits of the maternal legacy, and from them, the infant imbibed her cultural inheritance. The mother who nursed her own child also nursed the nation.[424]

Maternal nursing was a physical symbol providing concrete evidence of good mothering in action. From a public health standpoint, this was a valid, indeed important, consideration. Mother's milk was deemed essential to the survival of the child. An initiative by the *Société pour encourager les mères peu fortunées* in Lyon, for example, which offered indigent women a monthly 'wage' to nurse their children for one year, resulted in a dramatic decrease in the mortality rate, which fell to

---

[422] While this project focuses exclusively on French and Swiss writings, similar nationalist ideals shaped eighteenth-century English discourses on reproduction and breastfeeding. See, for example: Lisa Forman Cody, *Birthing the Nation: Sex, Science, and the Conception of Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005) and Toni Bowers, *The Politics of Motherhood: British writing and culture, 1680-1760* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[423] See, for example, Rousseau's tortured self-admonishments upon consummating his sexual relationship with Madame de Warens: "Je me vis pour la première fois dans les bras d'une femme, et d'une femme que j'adorais. Fus-je heureux? Non, je goûtai le plaisir. Je ne sais quelle invincible tristesse en empoisonnait le charme. J'étais comme si j'avais commis un inceste. Deux ou trois fois, en la pressant avec transport dans mes bras, j'inondai son sein avec mes larmes." (Rousseau, *Confessions*, 1:308-9)

[424] This imagery became extremely powerful during the French Revolution, when mothers were encouraged to do their part for *la patrie*. Marianne, the symbol of French revolutionary politics, is often depicted with milk flowing plentifully from bared breasts held out to the nation. For more on the Revolutionary politics of the breast, see Mary Jacobus, "Incorruptible Milk: Breast-feeding and the French Revolution," in *Rebel Daughters: Women and the French Revolution*, eds. Sara E. Melzer and Leslie W. Rabine (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 54-75.

sixteen percent from an average of over sixty percent for wetnursed children.[425] But public health motivations were eclipsed by moral motivators. Nursing was interpreted as tangible and demonstrable proof of a mother's *moral* goodness. Maternal nursing became a powerful symbol, not only for the survival of the child, but more significantly, for the physical embodiment of Rousseau's overarching desire: the moral regeneration of society. "When mothers deign to nurse their children," he counselled his readers, "then will be a reform in morals."[426]

The equation of breastfeeding with morality was not new. Mother's milk, in early Western thought, carried symbolic and psychological meanings that went far beyond mere health concerns. First and foremost among these was the belief that breast milk carried the temperament and passions of the mother or nurse.[427] The implications of this are clear: a wet nurse, or mercenary mother, would pass on greed, avarice, and selfishness, while the birth mother, selflessly nurturing her young child, would pass on only generosity and goodness.[428] But these beliefs went still deeper. Maternal milk carried not only beneficent moral qualities, but also transmitted qualities relating to social status and cultural heritage.[429] Mother's milk, passed from generation to generation through the generosity of the maternal body,

---

[425] Nancy Senior, "Aspects of Infant Feeding in Eighteenth-Century France," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 16.4 (1983): 373.

[426] Rousseau, *Emile*, 13.

[427] Senior, "Infant Feeding," 381.

[428] Roze de l'Epinoy, however, cautions mothers, urging them to moderate their passions because, "[l]es passions sont aussi héréditaires que les vices dans les humeurs; on suce avec le lait le poison de la haine ou de la colère, comme on suce d'une nourrice infectée un virus quelconque" (Roze de l'Epinoy, *Avis aux mères qui veulent allaiter* [Paris: P.F. Didot, le jeune, 1785], 42).

[429] For a discussion of this particular aspect of breastfeeding ideology as it was understood in eighteenth-century Europe, see Emilie L. Bergmann, "Language and "Mother's Milk": Maternal Roles and the Nurturing Body in Early Modern Spanish Texts," in *Maternal Measures: Figuring caregiving in the early modern period*, eds. Naomi J. Miller and Naomi Yavneh (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2000), 105-20.

thus became synonymous with the maintenance of the patriarchal bloodline. Madame Necker's metaphor of cultural assimilation through the breast is entirely à propos: "Pour avoir un goût parfait, faut-il être né dans un pays ou dans une société, à Paris par exemple, où l'on reçoive les principes du goût avec le lait et par l'autorité?"[430] It also offers further proof of her feelings of cultural and religious isolation. Madame Necker, unlike her colleagues, had not suckled at a French breast; rather, her maternal inheritance–a legacy of Calvinist belief, cultural dislocation, and forced exile which she sought to pass through to her daughter through her own breastfeeding–was decidedly different.[431]

The deeper implications of the eighteenth century's fascination with the maternal breast were many. Not only did the practice of wetnursing break a vital cultural link, thus divorcing the family from its traditional heritage, but it also, more insidiously, subverted the traditional social hierarchy, mixing the milk of the lower-class individual with the blood of the upper-class family.[432] Rousseau's words were written atop a virtual minefield of received ideas and superstition, and "contamination by the nurturing female body," wetnurse or otherwise, was a very real concern.[433] Only the milk of the mother could guarantee the lineage of the family, but only the milk of the *good* mother could carry within it such incorruptible values as

---

[430] Curchod Necker, *Mélanges*, 2:91.

[431] While Madame Necker does not directly equate her maternal breastfeeding with cultural transmission, the fact that she connects the ideas in her private writings and that, in a letter to a Swiss friend, she refers to her obligation to nurse, suggests that she was nevertheless clearly aware of this connection. Madelyn Gutwirth, however, suggests that Madame Necker is revolted by the sheer corporeality of motherhood (Gutwirth, "Suzanne Necker's Legacy," 17-40).

[432] For more on this, see the article "Nourrice s.f. (*Médec.*)," in *Encyclopédie*, 11:260-61.

[433] Bergmann, "Language and 'Mother's Milk'," 106.

purity, innocence, and virtue. Rousseau was not just looking for a mother, he was searching for a good mother, and it is clear that the two were not synonymous.

At the same time, the eighteenth-century maternal ideal offered women significant potential for self-realization within a role that hitherto had been accorded little cultural importance or attention. Maternal goodness permeated all aspects of a woman's life, from her conscious decision to nurse her own child, to issues of personal hygiene (such as nutritional concerns), and the cultivation of the highest standards of morality. Women's public lives were equally transformed. Rousseauist mothers, as their children's primary caregivers and teachers, spent far more time with their children than mothers of the past. Badinter observes that, "[t]he new generation lived constantly at their children's side. They nursed them, watched over them, bathed them, dressed them, walked them, and cared for their sicknesses."[434] As the portraits by Elizabeth Vigée-Lebrun suggest, mother and child were an inseparable unit, the one incomprehensible without the other. Many women welcomed these developments and fully embraced their newfound roles.[435] Among them were Marie-Jeanne Roland, the radical revolutionary who recounted to her husband the concerted efforts she undertook to nurse her own children, and Madame Necker.[436]

---

[434] Badinter, *Myth*, 177.

[435] There are also indications that some men did not welcome the physical impact of their wives' transitions from wife to mother. Madame d'Epinay's *Histoire de Madame de Montbrillant* and Isabelle de Charrière's *Lettres de Mistriss Henley publiées par son amie* both contain passages which demonstrate male ambivalence towards their partners' desires to nurse her children. See Louise Florence Pétronille Tardieu d'Esclavelles d'Epinay, *Les Contre-Confessions: Histoire de Madame de Montbrillant*, eds. Elisabeth Badinter and Georges Roth [Paris: Mercure de France, 1989] and Isabelle de Charrière, *Lettres de Mistriss Henley publiées par son amie*, ed. Joan Hinde Stewart and Philip Stewart [New York: Modern Language Association, 1993], 38-41).

[436] Badinter, *Myth*, 180.

Unfortunately, Madame Necker's virtuous choice to breastfeed her daughter proved ultimately unsuccessful. Less than four months after her daughter's birth, she was forced to hand this responsibility to a wetnurse. "[J]'ai eu...le chagrin amer, d'être obligée de discontinuer les fonctions de nourrice, après avoir surmonté toutes les peines et toutes les souffrances de cet état pendant près de quatre mois," she confessed, "ma petite fille s'affoiblissoit à vue d'oeil, et moi aussi."[437]

Madelyn Gutwirth reads Madame Necker's aborted attempt to breastfeed as evidence of her inability to come to terms with the essential corporeality of her maternal body. She further argues that this rupture might be seen as emblematic of the "mutual disappointment" experienced by both mother and daughter.[438] From this perspective Madame Necker's professed allegiance to–but failed actualization of–the dictates of corporeal maternity, highlights not only the fraught nature of Madame Necker's maternal performance, but also the tensions in her daughter's filial response.

Conventional wisdom suggests a strained relationship between Suzanne Necker and her daughter. Ascribing a rigid, stern, and somewhat imperious character to Madame Necker and an impetuous, liberated, and fun-loving personality to young Germaine, scholars and biographers have succeeded in crafting an oppositional relationship marked by somewhat crudely drawn individual portraits. The comments

---

[437] Curchod Necker, Letter to Etienette Clavel de Brenles, "Paris, 19 Novembre 1766," IS1915/xxx/h/1, BCUL. Also in Golowkin, *Lettres diverses*, 301-2. That she understood the symbolic role of breastfeeding as evidence of maternal goodness is evident from the following commentary, found in a later letter to her husband: "Je fus obligée de travailler durement sur ma frêle machine pour me rendre propre à nourrir, et je supprime des détails qui exigèrent tout le courage de la tendresse maternelle, épreuves douloureuses dont je conserve encore des traces et qui se prolongèrent pendant quatre mois d'une nourriture pénible mais où l'instinct maternel me dédommageait de toutes les souffrances" (Quoted in Andlau, *Jeunesse*, 47).

[438] Gutwirth, "Suzanne Necker's Legacy," 36.

of Béatrice d'Andlau are particularly revealing in this regard: "Une contrainte perpétuelle, voilà ce que représentait probablement la mère pour l'enfant gaie et spontanée," she writes, confirming the generally held impression that Suzanne Necker's understanding of maternal tenderness as "un devoir, comme les pauvres ou la toilette," amounted to nothing more than rigid severity which compromised young Germaine's natural genius and talents.[439] Other biographical works confirm Andlau's perceptions, painting Suzanne Necker as a woman so concerned with moral fortitude and severity that she neglected her daughter's need for freedom and movement.[440]

From such a characterization, Germaine emerges as a heroine who succeeds–and indeed ultimately triumphs–in spite of tremendous adversity. Madame Necker, on the other hand, fares poorly. "[P]eu de femmes semblent moins faites pour procréer que Mme Necker," notes Ghislain de Diesbach,[441] an observation with which Gutwirth concurs.[442] In the hands of Staël biographers, Suzanne Necker was an abusive mother[443] whose "impossibly high standards"[444] resulted in a relationship that lacked warmth and stifled Minette's natural precocity and all of her creative impulses.

---

[439] Andlau, *Jeunesse*, 36; 37.

[440] Diesbach, *Madame de Staël*; Faiweather, *Staël*; Gutwirth, *Staël, novelist*; Kohler, *Staël et la Suisse*; Herold, *Mistress to an Age*.

[441] Diesbach, *Madame de Staël*, 19.

[442] "[Madame Necker] would not prove to be the best of models for Germaine's passage to a confident sense of womanhood."(Gutwirth, *Staël, novelist*, 31). Despite Gutwirths criticisms, however, she she acknowledges that Suzanne Necker has been unfairly maligned as am mother and that her approach, while severe to the contemporary reader, emanated from common cultural practices of the time (31-32).

[443] Diesbach, *Madame de Staël*, 38.

[444] Fairweather, *Staël*, 33.

This dichotomous characterization supports the argument for a fraught and tension-filled filial relationship in which both women vied for the attention of a beloved husband and father, Jacques Necker. In this narrative, Madame Necker viewed her daughter as a failure, and, in addition to this, "as an unwelcome rival."[445] Dena Goodman uses this approach to highlight gendered social inequity, arguing that competition among women family members resulted from their oppressed position within French society.[446] Staël biographers, however, take a different perspective, viewing the conflicts between mother and daughter as evidence of a deep schism that laid the groundwork for what they see as Germaine's eventual usurpation of her mother's role, both on the salon stage and within her father's heart.[447] Maria Fairweather, for example, suggests that Germaine's success derived in large part from her personal qualities, claiming that Jacques Necker was drawn to the very qualities in her that Suzanne did not possess. Germaine, she contends, was "warm, generous, vivacious, spontaneous, effortlessly brilliant yet never pedantic."[448]

The approach taken by Staël scholars is perhaps unsurprising given their desire to paint their subject's life in a positive light. However, it does little justice to Suzanne Necker. Instead, it positions her as a rigid, authoritarian, and self-centered Beauvoir-esque maternal figure determined to mold her daughter in her own image: as a model of controlled sensibility and rational piety. Seen from this perspective,

---

[445] Gutwirth, *Staël, novelist*, 31. Gutwirth later argues that Staël and Necker had a somewhat incestuous relationship in which she replaced her mother as the object of her father's amorous affections.

[446] Goodman, "Filial Rebellion," 28-47.

[447] See, for example, Andlau, who argues that Germaine shifted allegiance from mother to father during her teenage years, developing what she terms variously as "une sorte de complicité ," "un accord secret," and an alliance from which Suzanne Necker was wholly excluded (Andlau, *Jeunesse*, 45).

[448] Fairweather, *Staël*, 37.

Madame Necker appears little concerned with her daughter's emotional needs and emerging intellect.

Some of this may well be true; certainly, there is enough evidence to suggest that Madame Necker was so consumed with her own psychic suffering that this directly impacted her maternal practice. But their relationship was far more nuanced than most of Staël's biographers have been willing to accept. While it definitely turned on Suzanne Necker's desire for narcissistic display, it also reflected her fundamental belief in her personal unworthiness; in other words, her essential understanding of herself as a moral failure incapable of recovering lost virtue.

Moral Modelling and Maternal Dissonance

From the outset, Madame Necker was determined to raise her young daughter in a morally rigorous fashion. Minette was baptized into the Protestant faith during an intimate ceremony in the chapel of the Dutch embassy and raised under the watchful eyes of her mother[449] and a series of Protestant caregivers: from her wetnurse–"une grosse Flamande"[450]–to her governesses, and finally, her single childhood friend, the carefully-chosen and vetted Catherine Rilliet Huber. Minette's education was deeply informed by Calvinist moral principles. Madame Necker supervised her daughter's active initiation into the Calvinist faith by ordering Catechism books from Swiss friends before her second birthday.[451] Within a few years, Minette was reciting catechismal texts and discussing religious principles.

---

[449] "Pendant treize ans je ne l'ai presque pas perdue de vue...J'ai cultivé sa mémoire et son esprit. Pendant treize ans des plus belles années de ma vie, au milieu de beaucoup d'autres soins indispensables, je ne l'ai presque pas perdue de vue" (quoted in Andlau, *Jeunesse*, 47)

[450] Curchod Necker, Letter to Henriette and Sophie Réverdil, 1766, ms.suppl. 717, BGE.

[451] Curchod Necker, Letter to Henriette Réverdil, ce 10 sept [1768], ms.suppl. 717, BGE.

Madame Necker thus sheltered her daughter within a Calvinist cocoon, laying the foundation for her subsequent intellectual development.

Minette's intellectual education was equally rigorous. Attentive to her role as maternal teacher and guide, Madame Necker designed an educational program which in many respects, mirrored her own. Minette learned a variety of languages, immersed herself in scientific studies, and was also exposed to the activities suitable to a young woman of gentility: not only did she paint, but she also learned to play a number of musical instruments and took lessons in elocution and acting from the great Clairon, the leading actress on the French stage during this period.

Minette's education, like that of her mother before her, was remarkable for its time and a testament to Madame Necker's belief that the social disparity between men and women was the result of educational inequity.[452] With her daughter, she was determined to take a different path. She would not raise her daughter in ignorance, like Rousseau's Sophie, but would instead model her child on Emile.[453] While contemporary commentators have correctly suggested that her approach differed markedly from that proposed by Rousseau,[454] the goals and ends were the same: the crafting of a critical and sensitive mind capable of independent thought and fully prepared for roles of moral and civic leadership in a new society of equals. From her writings, it is clear that Madame Necker's pedagogical approach was the result of careful and thorough deliberation. She encouraged her daughter to think critically, challenged her to cultivate a morally rigorous stance which would prepare

---

[452] Curchod Necker, *Nouveaux Mélanges*, 1:76.

[453] Curchod Necker, Letter to Etienette Clavel de Brenles, Paris, le 12 Décembre 1768, IS1915/xxx/h/1, BCUL; see also Golowkin, *Lettres diverses*, 359.

[454] Andlau, *Jeunesse*, 25.

her for a pious adult life dedicated to serving God and society, and revelled in her daughter's precocity and intellectual prowess.[455]

One aspect of Madame Necker's educational approach, however, rings dissonantly. Minette's early childhood was spent in relative isolation, carefully protected from the dangers of the Parisian social sphere, with only her mother, governess, and her mother's close friends for company. All of this changed when Madame Necker, following the model introduced by her mentor, Madame Geoffrin, initiated her daughter into her salon at the age of eleven. For the next seven years, Minette was an active presence in her mother's intellectual world. Seated on a wicker stool at her mother's feet, she conversed with her mother's close friends, in particular Raynal, Thomas, Marmontel, and the Marquis de Pezay, and followed the conversations with great interest. As Catherine Rilliet Huber recalled:

> On conçoit que pendant le dîner nous ne dîmes rien; nous écoutions; mais il fallut voir comment Mlle Necker écoutait! Ses regards suivaient les mouvements de ceux qui parlaient et avaient l'air d'aller au-devant de leurs idées. Elle n'ouvrait pas la bouche et semblait pourtant parler à son tour, tant ses traits mobiles avaient d'expression. Elle était au fait de tout, saisissait tout, comprenait tout, même les sujets politiques qui à cette époque faisaient déjà un des grands intérêts de la conversation.[456]

For Minette, this must have been a remarkable experience. The salon became her classroom, a space in which she thrived. Here, she first encountered and then cultivated the seductive delights of conversation and intellectual exchange that would later become so central to her identity.

---

[455] See letters from Suzanne to Germaine Necker as quoted in Haussonville, *Salon*, 2:40-44.

[456] Catherine Rilliet Huber, "Notes sur l'enfance de Madame de Staël," *Occident et cahiers staëliens*, 2.1 (1933): 41-47; Catherine Rilliet Huber, "Notes sur l'enfance de Madame de Staël (suite et fin)," *Occident et cahiers staëliens* 2.2 (1934): 140-46.

While Madame Necker apparently fully approved of her daughter's presence, viewing her daughter's conversations and discussions as a form of intellectual "gymnastique,"[457] this salon education was nonetheless a curious pedagogical choice, particularly given her penchant for moral rectitude and pious devotion. The salon was a space that threatened to undermine her carefully laid moral foundation, replacing it with the secular worldliness and excessive opulence of the Parisian philosophical and aristocratic communities.[458]

It was also an approach that troubled the French elite. After all, the example set by Geoffrin had not proven particularly successful. Geoffrin and her daughter, Marie-Thérèse d'Estampes, Marquise de La Ferté-Imbault, shared a particularly acrimonious relationship punctuated by violent outbursts and lengthy periods of silence.[459] The Marquise completely disavowed the philosophical principles propagated by her mother's salon guests and close friends. Denouncing all contemporary philosophers as moral vagrants, she clung to the ideals of seventeenth-century moral philosophers such as Nicolas Malebranche. In a century

---

[457] Rilliet Huber, "Notes," 43.

[458] See, for example, Suzanne Necker's marked antipathy for Parisian social life, as described in Necker, *Mélanges*, 1:184: "Chaque jour ajoute à mon dégoût pour le grand monde; tout m'y paroit factice, et l'on aperçoit surtout que les vertus sont simulées, parce qu'elles sont exagérées. Je suis, par exemple, entourée à présent de femmes sensibles, qui passent fréquemment, et pour de légers sujets, les nuits dans les larmes et le jour dans les inquiétudes mortelles: elles sont pour moi comme les livres dont la morale est outrée; l'on sait bien que ceux qui les écrivoient n'étoient pas de bonne foi, mais l'on est humilié de ne pouvoir atteindre à la perfection dont il nous ont donné l'idée."

[459] For more details on this relationship, see the following recent analyses: Benedetta Craveri, "Madame de La Ferté-Imbault (1715-1791) et son monde," *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* 105. 1 (2005): 95-110; Craveri, *Age of Conversation*, 303-312; Goodman, "Filial Rebellion," 28-47; Didier Masseau, "Marquise de La Ferté-Imbault, reine antiphilosophe des Lanturelus," in *Les dérèglements de l'art: formes et procédures de l'illégitimité culturelle en France : 1715-1914*, eds. Pierre Popovic and Érik Vigneault (Montreal, Canada: Presses de l'université de Montréal, 2001), 35-50.

that viewed the child as the 'ouvrage' of the mother, Geoffrin's maternal success was questionable at best.[460]

Suzanne Necker's decision to model the approach taken by her mentor aroused the suspicions and doubts of her contemporaries. Among the most enduring and most articulate of these critical responses are the reminiscences of Madame de Genlis, whose multi-volume *Mémoires* includes numerous vignettes featuring various members of the Necker family. After outlining what she perceived to be curiously excessive behaviour on the part of young Germaine Necker, Genlis continued:

> Madame Necker l'avait fort mal élevée, en lui laissant passer dans son salon les trois quarts de ses journées, avec la foule des beaux-esprits de ce temps, qui tous entouraient mademoiselle Necker; et tandis que sa mère s'occupait des autres personnes, et surtout des femmes qui venaient la voir, les beaux-esprits dissertaient avec mademoiselle Necker sur les passions et sur l'amour. La solitude de sa chambre et de bons livres auraient mieux valu pour elle.[461]

In this short tableau, Genlis, a prolific writer and astute commentator on aristocratic social and cultural life, outlined the main points of tension. She suggested that the salon was an inappropriate place for children, and, more particularly, for young girls. With its emphasis on *galanteries* and the sensuous and suggestive interplay of themes such as love and passion, it was a space dedicated to the cultivation of adult conversation and the discussion of mature subject matter.

As proof of the inherent impropriety of Madame Necker's pedagogical approach, Genlis cited the later published work of Germaine de Staël, in particular her 1796 publication, *De l'influence des passions sur les nations et sur les individus*.

---

[460] The incisive commentary of Simone de Beauvoir on the nature of the mother/daughter relationship in general is particularly revealing in this regard. See Beauvoir, *Second Sex,* 484-527.

[461] Genlis, *Mémoires*, 3:296.

"Le but [du livre] est de prouver l'utilité des passions," she observed, "[C]'était la doctrine des encyclopédistes, qui entourèrent l'enfance et la jeunesse de madame de Staël. Il faut pardonner à sa mémoire ces principes pernicieux, on les lui avait inspirés dès le berceau."[462] Madame Genlis spoke from a position of public authority. As the author of *Adèle et Théodore*, a two-volume work on aristocratic pedagogy which was a finalist for the 1783 *Prix d'utilité*, she was an acknowledged expert in the field of children's education.[463] In addition to this, she was a celebrated playwright and novelist who considered all of her creative work to be moral in nature.[464]

The question of Madame Necker's salon education continues to baffle scholars and biographers, most of whom observe the clear slippage between Madame Necker's religious belief and spiritual stance and those propagated by her largely irreligious guests. Her decision appears even more unusual when viewed in the light of her own discomfort in–and indeed, aversion to–the salon and its practices. It is at this point of apparent dissonance, however, that we can learn the most about Suzanne Necker's Calvinist beliefs and their relationship to her maternal practice. In many ways, the salon functioned as the site of Suzanne Necker's maternal abjection. In order to examine this more fully, it might be useful to consider the following questions. Why did Suzanne Necker choose to raise her daughter in the

---

[462] Genlis, *Mémoires*, 5:326.

[463] Genlis, Stéphanie Félicité Du Crest de St. Aubin, Comtesse de, *Adèle et Théodore, ou Lettres sur l'éducation*, 3 vols. (Paris: Imprimerie M. Lambert, 1782).

[464] "I dare believe that my novels are treatises on morality" (Genlis, *The Rival Mothers, or Calumny*, 4 vols. [London: Strahan, 1800; Eighteenth-Century Collections Online], http://galenet.galegroup.com.proxy.lib.sfu.ca/servlet/ECCO.

salon? What purpose did such an education serve? Finally, what role did Minette play within the salon?

Mothering in the Salon

According to the recollections of Germaine Necker's only childhood friend, Catherine Rilliet Huber, Germaine joined her mother's salon at the age of eleven and was a regular presence until the age of eighteen.[465] She was an attentive, obedient, and much-loved member of her mother's salon community and developed friendships with some of her mother's most intimate guests, among them Marmontel and Thomas. With these men, she extended the conversation of the salon through epistolary exchanges, sharing humorous verses and correspondence.[466] As she grew older, she herself became remarkably adept in salon sociability and thrived in the space of the salon, ultimately eclipsing her mother in skill and brilliance.[467]

This aspect of the story is well known. What is open to further speculation is the purpose behind Suzanne Necker's decision to raise her child in her salon and Minette's function within the context of Madame Necker's self presentation. While Rilliet Huber offers one possible rationale for Madame Necker's decision, arguing that Necker perceived Minette's salon education as a form of mental and intellectual athleticism,[468] this reasoning proves unsatisfactory, particularly in light of Madame Necker's professed moral fear of the Parisian social sphere and her concomitant determination, until that point, to raise her child in obscure privacy, nestled within a

---

[465] See Rilliet Huber, "Notes 1931," 43.

[466] See Andlau, *Jeunesse*, 121-124; 148-152.

[467] Andlau, *Jeunesse*, 48-9.

[468] "Mme Necker qui, si sévère à d'autres égards, trouvait fort bon que l'on s'occupât sous ses yeux et qu'on la fît causer; elle regardait cela comme une espèce de gymnastique des faculté intellectuelles" (Rilliet Huber, "Notes," 43).

protective cocoon of Calvinist religious belief. Why, indeed, would Madame Necker, so very cautious about her daughter's moral upbringing, suddenly release her into the tumultuous and, as Genlis points out, socially inappropriate, environment of the salon?

In order to answer this question, I turn to the complicated relationships between maternity, virtue, and display as they played themselves out in the salon. Madame Necker was fully aware of the performative power of virtuous practice.[469] But maternal virtue, as noted previously, depended on women's seclusion within the domestic sphere: the mother's first duty was to her child and family, to the cultivation of the virtuous family unit which would function as the foundation for a reformed, virtuous society. In a society that viewed the daughter as the 'work' of the mother, however, public recognition of successful maternal practice was essential. The daughter embodied the results of maternal care, physically displaying the commitment and devotion of virtuous motherhood. Germaine Necker, at eleven, was a prime reflection of dedicated and conscientious maternal care. Intellectually precocious and vivacious by nature, she functioned as an ideal foil to her more reserved mother. Her position, seated demurely on a stool at her mother's feet, reinforced both the familial and the hierarchical bond.[470]

There were also political implications to this positioning, implications that suggest Minette's salon role as an integral element in the construction of a

---

[469] [Curchod Necker], *Hospice de Charité* (Paris: Imprimerie royale, 1781), 3.

[470] See, for example, the writings of Fénelon, who argued strongly for women's education on the basis of social stability (François de Salignac de la Mothe-Fénelon, *Fénelon on Education*, ed H.C Barnard [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966]). As the family's moral core, women were responsible for transmitting their values to their children and, as such, their education had to be carefully and judiciously managed.

constellation of Calvinist virtue. Jacques Necker assumed the position of *Directeur général du Trésor royal* in 1776 and, in 1777, became *Directeur général des finances*. While these nominations effectively ensured Necker's control over the largest political portfolio in the French nation, they were not without controversy. As the director of French finance, industry, agriculture, and commerce, Necker should rightfully have been given the post of *Contrôleur général*. Instead, as a foreigner and a protestant, Necker was forced to practice subterfuge. Aligning himself with a series of puppet finance ministers, he served king and state from a lesser position.

Read in this light, Germaine's salon presence, which dates from about 1777, was critical to the Necker's self-fashioning as a family of virtue and integrity, united in Calvinist belief against the prejudice and intolerance of the French state. Germaine, as the product of the virtuous protestant marriage, embodied the profession of faith, a public act of Calvinist witness in a political environment still hostile to the protestant religion. Jacques Necker was a regular, if mostly silent, presence in his wife's salon. The inclusion of his daughter, a conscious choice given the conventions of the period, suggests that even in the face of politically inspired religious persecution, Necker and his family would, nonetheless, persevere. Together, they embodied Rousseau's virtuous triumverate, with Madame Necker–mother and wife–at its moral core, and Germaine–the dutiful daughter–as its mascot. In this instance, Germaine emerged as an emblem designed both to publicly demonstrate the religious fidelity of her parents and to promote religious toleration, which would not come about for another ten years.[471]

[471] The Edict of Toleration was signed in November 1787 and came into force in January 1788.

Such a move, I suggest, dramatically reconceived the nature of the salon. No longer a space dedicated to the cultivation of the French aristocratic identity, it was instead re-imagined for the display of religious and cultural alterity through the active display of maternal virtue. By inserting Germaine into the salon at this critical juncture in Jacques Necker's political career, Madame Necker gestured towards her husband's innate moral virtue, as represented in the form of his only child, Germaine.[472]

But there exists also a further possibility, which derives from the previous two. In this scenario, Madame Necker's personal anguish takes centre stage. By raising her daughter in the salon, Suzanne Necker acknowledged the salon as the site of her moral downfall, accepting and claiming the dangerous threats posed by unchecked feminine ambition and desire. She also demonstrated her renewed commitment to the memory of her mother by claiming the space for the performance of domestic virtue. From there, she exerted the importance of the obligations imposed on her by her faith. Necker's approach fundamentally undermined the social and intellectual nature of the salon by imprinting upon it a domestic model more properly suited to her religious beliefs. The salon, in this instance, became a performative space in which Suzanne Necker, rather than her elite guests, took centre stage. In this reading, Germaine takes on a supporting role in order to bolster the self-fashioning of her parents: positioned to reflect the success of her mother's teachings, she provided confirmation of Suzanne's inherent maternal goodness.

---

[472] Such a reading is given credence by the work of Jean-Denis Bredin, who concentrates on presenting the Necker family as a self-congratulatory and mutually adoring triptych of reciprocal virtue. See Jean-Denis Bredin, *Une Singulière Famille: Jacques Necker, Suzanne Necker et Germaine de Staël* (Paris: Fayard, 1999).

This positioning served a dual function. First of all, it enabled Suzanne to mark herself as other to the Parisian elite. By performing domesticity before a limited public, she reconceived the sociable sphere, not by emphasizing its publicity, but by stressing its intimacy. She also reached further. By demonstrating her difference–by physically asserting her alterity from the people around her–she sought to reconcile herself with the internal exile that had haunted her since her mother's death. In other words, her public maternal practice can be seen as a demonstration of her pious devotion to God and her mother, and her allegiance to their teachings. Through her salon performances, Madame Necker expressed her devotion, faith, and fidelity in much the same way as the protestants of Calvin's day had maintained their religious fidelity in the face of extreme opposition. Seeming to gesture towards the actions of persecuted Huguenot women in centuries past, Madame Necker publicly professed her allegiance to Calvinism in a space otherwise culturally marked as both Catholic and French. In so doing, she laid claim to a maternal religious inheritance that transcended the severed relationship with her own mother and reached back to heroic actions of the first generations of French Calvinists. In the process, she re-imagined not only the religious and geographic exile imposed on her mother and grandmother before her, but also the cultural and moral exile which marked her own life experiences.

By figuratively rewriting the space of the salon, Madame Necker also rewrote her own culpability. The decision to locate her maternal practice at the very site of her moral downfall thus emerges as a forced confrontation between literary ambition, maternal desire, and filial duty. This combination set the stage for the corporeal suffering that marked her adult life. In the process, the salon, previously understood

as an instance of Parisian aristocratic identity, was subsumed into a domestic performance of Calvinist maternal virtue.

As discussed earlier, the salon was an inherently performative space in which each actor, in the words of Jolanta Pekacz, "was expected to incarnate characteristics considered appropriate for his or her social position, gender, age, marital status and circumstances."[473] Within this hierarchy, the guests starred in leading roles, while the *salonnière*, guiding and directing the action on the salon stage, took a necessarily supporting role. Suzanne Necker transformed this relationship entirely. Even as she maintained the superficial accoutrements of her role as *salonnière*, projecting selflessness, generosity, and concern for her guests, her appropriation of the salon as a projection screen for her public performance of conflicted maternal desire, filial obligation, and conjugal bliss effectively subverted the unwritten law of the salon itself by sidelining its leading actors.

Instead, the salon became the stage upon which Necker colonized and realized her maternal role, and through which she attempted to come to terms with her filial responsibilities. By presenting her family–an enchanted constellation of virtue which included a benevolent father, a loving, generous, and affectionate mother, and a charming and precocious child–as the embodiment of the enlightened domestic utopia, Madame Necker laid claim to membership in the republic of virtue and forced her guests into positions of captive, and somewhat uncomfortable,

[473] Pekacz, "Salon as Spectacle," 87.

spectators.[474] As voyeurs into the intimate and personal relationships of the Necker family, they were no longer able to gaze adoringly upon pleasing reflections of themselves through the mediation of the *salonnière*'s mirror, and were instead faced with the risky and potentially unpleasant task of self-reflection. Madame Necker, by refusing the sociable mirror, fundamentally destabilized the perceived coherence of the elite identity.

Such a reading posits a heroic gesture on Madame Necker's part, paving the way for the recuperation of her sullied virtue and for the cultivation of a praiseworthy life lived in the warm light of divine grace. Suzanne's actions speak to a deep desire to recover her filial loss, an intense longing to retrieve that from which she had been separated. In rewriting the salon, she was also rewriting the maternal story, projecting her filial responsibility though her maternal desire. In other words, by being seen to be actively mothering her daughter, she sought to rewrite the narrative of Original Sin, imprinting on it a different story with an altogether happier ending.

Unfortunately, this was not to be. Germaine blossomed in the salon, developing there the formidable conversational skill that she would take into adulthood. As she grew older, her relationship with her mother grew increasingly acrimonious, as maternal dominance on Suzanne's part came into conflict with filial rebellion. The dutiful daughter so lovingly constructed and so proudly displayed by the devoted mother came into her own as a prodigiously talented, wilful woman

---

[474] Carol Blum argues that Rousseau's success, as the incarnation of the man of virtue, hinged in large part on his adoption of a virtuous stance–on his self-positioning as the man of virtue of his books (Carol Blum, *Rousseau and Virtue*). Suzanne Necker's performative posture reflects Rousseau's approach: that of an active staking of one's claim; in other words, an active engagement with–and deployment of–the performative nature of virtue.

whose thirst for passionate displays mirrored her mother's equally intense need for strict balance and moral equilibrium.[475]

Germaine, as her mother's only child, represented Necker's only possibility of recovering her virtue. In a telling observation Suzanne Necker noted that: "Il y a un tel degré de vertu qui nous rend indifféres à toutes les gloires, excepté à celle d'avoir des enfans qui nous ressemblent."[476] Her daughter, a symbol of successful maternal practice proudly displayed in the salon, offered the possibility of filial redemption. However, Germaine's repudiation of her maternal inheritance through her romantic attachments subverted Necker's recuperative project. In giving birth, Suzanne did not, as she so fervently wished, double herself. Instead, her daughter took a consciously different path. Challenging her mother's authority and ultimately far surpassing her in conversational prowess, intellectual abandon, and ill-advised passionate excess and display, Germaine left her mother with the realization that her quest for virtue was ultimately futile. Indeed, Germaine's refusal to conform to Suzanne's expectations only reinforced the consequences of her mother's own youthful negligence. By superimposing her own sin upon that of her daughter, Suzanne Necker gestured towards a troubling truth: the sins of the daughter were, in a sense, the sins of the mother, so that Suzanne Necker's own filial culpability became the source of her daughter's moral downfall. History had repeated itself. Just as Suzanne Necker had failed her mother, so too, Germaine now failed hers. Madame Necker, already marked by personal moral weakness with regard to her own

---

[475] "Ma fille n'a pas besoin de moi pour être heureuse. Ses goûts et les miennes diffèrent, et bientôt elle cessera même de me regretter" (Quoted in Haussonville, *Salon*, 2:18).

[476] Curchod Necker, *Mélanges*, 1:88.

mother, was now doubly marked by what she perceived to be the moral disarray of her daughter.[477]

[477] See a 1794 letter from Germaine de Staël to Narbonne, in which she recounts a conversation with her mother during which Madame Necker blames Staël's ill-advised liaison with Narbonne for her failing health (Staël, *Correspondance générale*, 2:253).

Chapter 4:
Performing Pathology: Staging the Sick Body

Il est certain que l'exercice et l'enthousiasme de la vertu exaltent les ames, et je crois que chaque action honnête délie un des chainons qui attachent l'ame à la foiblesse du corps; je sens, je l'avoue, que le moi dépend absolument de ma santé, et mon coeur seul n'en est pas esclave.[478]

On a dit que la médecine étoit la théologie du corps.[479]

Madame Necker's moral stigma and suffering were physically imprinted on her body. Her husband and first biographer, Jacques Necker, cited her extensive physical distress, observing that:

> de fort bonne heure, elle fut soumise à des angoisses nerveuses si tellement pénibles, que, par degrés, elle perdit le sommeil; et le jour, obligé de céder à un mouvement d'agitation, elle se tenoit debout, même en société, et n'obtenoit un peu de repos que dans le bain.[480]

This theme of continual suffering is later taken up in the portrait penned by Laure Junot, the Duchesse d'Abrantès, in the six-volume *Histoire des salons de Paris*, her

---

[478] Curchod Necker, Letter to Madame de Brenles, Paris, le 13 février 1770, IS1915/xxx/h/1, BCUL; see also Golowkin, *Lettres diverses*, 383.

[479] Curchod Necker, *Nouveaux Mélanges*, 2:135.

[480] Necker, "Observations de l'éditeur," 1:xii.

monumental paean to aristocratic sociability and sensibility.[481] In her first chapter, entitled "Salon de Madame Necker. 1787," Madame Necker emerges, perhaps unsurprisingly, as a somewhat stiff woman little prone to outward displays of affection.[482] Most of all, however, she appears pale and weak, a woman consumed by suffering: "Elle était belle pourtant, si l'on pouvait l'être avec cette pâleur de mort qui couvrait son visage, et dont le regard éternel de ses yeux confirmait la triste vérité."[483]

In 1787, the date of Abrantès' literary portrait, Suzanne Necker was fifty years old. In many ways, she was in her prime. As the director of an experimental charity hospital, she enjoyed an active presence on the public and political stage. On a personal level, she was soon to become a grandmother.[484] In addition to this, the Edict of Toleration, signed in late November 1787, finally allowed her to publicly practice her Calvinist faith. But all was not smooth sailing. The political situation in Paris was tense: France was on the verge of bankruptcy and Jacques Necker's actions and 1781 *Compte Rendu* were publicly called into question by his successor Calonne. After Necker illegally published his rebuttal, he was officially exiled for a period of four months.[485] Madame Necker's closest French friend Antoine-Léonard Thomas had died in 1785, and Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, another intimate ally, would die in 1788. Meanwhile, the actions of her daughter were cause for concern: newly married to Eric Magnus, Baron de Staël-Holstein in 1786, Germaine was reputedly amorously linked to the rakish Jacques-Antoine-Hippolyte,

---

[481] Abrantès, *Salons de Paris.*
[482] Abrantès, *Salons de Paris*, 1:102; 104.
[483] Abrantès, *Salons de Paris*, 1:83.
[484] Her first grandchild, Gustavine de Staël, was born on 22 July 1787.
[485] Necker was recalled in two months, and reinstated as *Directeur général des finances* in 1788.

Comte de Guibert.[486] Further worries ensued: in 1788, Germaine's daughter Gustavine fell ill and died in April 1789 after months of suffering.

Suzanne Necker, herself, was profoundly sick. In preceding years, she had sought the advice of numerous medical professionals, among them the celebrated Swiss doctor Tronchin, and had travelled to Spa (1765), London (1776), Mont d'Or (1768), Montpellier (1784), Marolles (1785), and most recently, in September 1786, Plombières, in search of respite from her suffering.[487] But respite was difficult to come by: an unsent letter to Louis XVI, penned in 1787, reveals that she was still experiencing significant physical distress.[488]

Illness is a recurring theme in Suzanne Necker's life. From the abject torment during the period immediately following the death of her mother through to the intense sufferings that marked the two years prior to her own death in 1794, her body was consumed by malady. Her correspondence details a litany of physical complaints, from easily definable symptoms such as coughs, fevers, and vertigo, to more amorphous generalized feelings of suffering, languishing, and weakness. To date, these illnesses have received little attention. Instead, biographical interpretations, consigning Madame Necker's sufferings to the realm of narcissistic

---

[486] Fairweather, *Staël*, 68.

[487] See Curchod Necker, Letters to Etienette Clavel de Brenles, Paris, 7 novembre 1765; Paris, le 12 décembre 1768, IS1915/xxx/h/1 (both also found in Golowkin, *Lettres diverses*, 267-68, 356; Catriona Seth, "Madame Necker: Une vie au service des autres," *Cahiers staëliens* 57(2006): 174; Antoine-Léonard Thomas's 1784 and 1785 letters to Madame Necker (Thomas, *Oeuvres complètes*, 6:404-427; 6:434-436; 6:440-446; 6:453-466; 6:470-474 and 6:503); and Germaine de Staël, *Correspondance générale*, ed. B. W. Jasinski, 4 vols. (Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1962-1978), 1:117-131.

[488] Othenin d'Haussonville, "Un projet de lettre de Mme Necker à Louis XVI," *Cahiers staëliens* 20 (1976): 3-8.

hypochondria,[489] have either quickly dispensed with them or treated them as evidence of her inherent morbidity and emotional excess. Understood within the context of a pious, Calvinist existence and read through her experiences of filial and maternal torment, however, a new perspective emerges.

In this chapter I will look more closely at Madame Necker's experience of illness and seek to understand its purpose and function in her life by reading her sufferings through a double lens. Situating her experiences in the context of eighteenth-century conceptions of public health, hygiene, morality, gender, and embodied understandings of the self, I further develop the theme of spiritual and maternal abjection by linking her corporeal distress to a variety of factors. These include the profound spiritual malaise which emerged after her mother's death, her moral struggles between literary ambition and maternal desire, and her need to cultivate a position of cultural alterity. I assert that the rupture of the maternal body resulted in the sick body, a process whereby filial and maternal anguish, enacted on the salon stage, came to reside in a new performative entity: the suffering body. I argue that Necker's staging of malady can be seen as central to her Calvinist belief, and therefore, integral to her conception of self. The principles of display, exile, longing, and communion are expressed on the corporeal stage, which is conceived as a site for the abject veneration of God and a memorial to maternal loss.

Suzanne Necker was undoubtedly prone to the myriad of nervous maladies which at that time characterized her women of her social class, and in many

[489] Maria Fairweather, for example, identifies Suzanne Necker's obsessive compulsions regarding death as a "tiresome" characteristic (Fairweather, *Staël*, 47), while J. Christopher Herold pokes fun at Madame Necker's elaborate burial plans (Herold, *Mistress to an Age*, 51).

respects, her experiences mirror those of her contemporaries, Madame d'Epinay,[490] who spent time under the care of Tronchin in Geneva,[491] and Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, whose tortured letters to the Comte de Guibert provide clear evidence of the links between psychic trauma and somatic suffering.[492]

To entirely dismiss Necker's corporeal experiences on these grounds, however, is problematic. While her illnesses can be seen as unremarkable or unexceptional, the very ubiquity of illness in her life experience, when read together with her public commitment to French hospital reform, her deep interests in medical literature, and her concern for the dying body, demands not only acknowledgement, but also further examination. Such a reading, while concentrating on the activities of one particular woman, nonetheless provides the framework for a better understanding of eighteenth-century women's illnesses in general.

Illness as Everyday Experience in Eighteenth Century France

Illness was a fact of Suzanne Necker's life from her childhood on. In the early 1760s, Magdeleine Curchod detailed her daughter's slow recovery from a bout of smallpox.[493] Béatrice d'Andlau cites Madame Necker's comments about her deafness in one ear, the result of a childhood malady.[494] Throughout her adult years, too,

---

[490] Louise Florence Pétronille Tardieu d'Esclavelles, Madame d'Epinay (1726-1783), was a French writer and *salonnière* whose works include an influential treatise on female education, *Les Conversations d'Emilie*, and contributions to Friedrich Melchior Grimm's *Correspondance littéraire*. She maintained close–though sometimes acrimonious-ties with many of the leading figures of the French Enlightenment, among them Rousseau, Diderot and Grimm.

[491] See Louise Florence Pétronille Tardieu d'Esclavelles d'Epinay, Letter to Guillaume-Antoine de Luc, Genève 7 Oct. 1758, Dossier D016/56, BGE.

[492] Julie de Lespinasse, *Lettres*, 1809 (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1997); see also Felicia B. Sturzer, "Love and disease: the contaminated letters of Julie de Lespinasse," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 2000.8 (2000): 3-16.

[493] Magdeleine Curchod, Letter to Henriette Réverdil, undated, ms.suppl. 363, BGE.

[494] Andlau, *Jeunesse*, 29.

Necker enumerated her recognizable medical symptoms: fevers, coughs, and chills that waxed and waned with the seasons.

In this, Suzanne Necker was not alone, since illness was a central facet of eighteenth-century lived experience. David Vess paints a picture of a society marked by recurring seasonal ailments, vicious epidemics, and contagious diseases that affected all social and economic classes:

> Diseases bred freely in polluted streams and in refuse-clogged roads and narrow, puddled streets. Diphtheria, measles, smallpox, and scarlet fever were killers known in every town....Every winter and spring, epidemic pneumonias and *la grippe* appeared. Typhoid fever, dysentery, and malaria repeatedly ravaged France during the eighteenth century....Lice and the itch were endemic, affecting practically everyone....venereal disease was prevalent.[495]

In this environment, physical suffering was an inescapable fact, relief was almost impossible to find, and early death an all too common occurrence.[496] Medical care was sporadic, largely inaccessible, and perceived to be not only ineffectual, but also dangerous. While there was a diverse range of options available to would-be patients, the medical profession was, in general, only locally organized and largely unregulated.[497] Only the wealthy had unrestricted access to medical opinion.[498]

---

[495] David M. Vess, *Medical Revolution in France, 1789-1796* (Gainesville, USA: Florida State University Press, 1975), 11.

[496] Solange Simon-Mazoyer observes that the death rate from outbreaks of smallpox ranged from an average of ca. 16% to 33%, noting that a 1723 outbreak cost the lives of some 20,000 Parisians. See Solange Simon-Mazoyer, "Le conflit entre les excès de la mode et de la santé au XVIIIe siècle: l'"habillage" du visage," in *La médecine des Lumières: tout autour de Tissot*, eds. Vincent Barras and Micheline Louis-Courvoisier (Geneva and Paris: Georg Editeur, 2001), 41-42.

[497] Matthew Ramsey, *Professional and Popular Medicine in France, 1770-1830* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 69.

[498] Ramsey, *Medicine in France*, 62. As the daughter of a rural pastor, Suzanne Necker would no doubt have witnessed the sufferings of impoverished parishioners: Tissot's *dossiers de consultation* identify local religious leaders as sources of authority who regularly intervened on their parishioners' behalf by writing and contacting medical professionals.

Among the lower classes, mistrust of the medical profession was high, and not without reason. Overcrowded hospitals were not known to heal people, but rather contributed to ever worsening symptoms and, all too frequently, death. The Hôtel-Dieu in Paris, for example, was a space of deep suffering where contagion ran rampant, infecting helpless and otherwise innocent individuals who were desperate to be healed. In the words of Diderot, it was:

> ...le plus étendu, le plus nombreux, le plus riche & le plus effrayant de tous nos hôpitaux....Qu'on se représente une longue enfilade de salles contiguës, où l'on rassemble les malades de toute espèce, & où l'on en entasse souvent trois, quatre, cinq & six dans un même lit; les vivans à côté des moribonds & des morts; l'air infecté des exhalaisons de cette multitude de corps mal sains, portant des uns aux autres les germes pestilentiels de leurs infirmités; & le spectacle de la douleur & de l'agonie de tous côtés offert & reçû. Voilà l'*hôtel-Dieu.*[499]

Diderot painted a picture of unimaginable horror, evoking depths of physical suffering and dangerous contagion that threatened not only the life of the individual, but also the French populace as a whole.

Diderot's observations were not isolated. Jacques Tenon's report on the state of Paris hospitals, the *Mémoires sur les hôpitaux de Paris* (1788), both confirmed and extended Diderot's critique.[500] Citing mortality rates that were the highest in the world, far outpacing those in Edinburgh or Vienna,[501] Tenon penned a damning indictment of Parisian medical practice and fully revealed the extent to which the profession and the state had failed society's weakest members. In response, Tenon proposed a series of minimum standards to ensure improved patient care.

---

[499] Denis Diderot, "Hôtel-Dieu," *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, par une Société de Gens de lettres,* eds. Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert, 28 vols. (Paris: 1751-1772), 8:319.

[500] Jacques Tenon, *Mémoires sur les hôpitaux de Paris* (Paris: Chez Royez, libraire, 1788).

[501] Tenon, *Mémoires*, 278.

Tenon's work represented the culmination of a public health movement that had emerged early in the second half of the eighteenth century and in which Suzanne Necker played an active role. The publication of Samuel-Auguste-André-David Tissot's *Avis au peuple sur sa santé* in 1761 paved the way for a profound reconceptualization of social responsibility for the health and well being of the citizenry as a whole.[502]

Tissot's work was immensely influential and widely available. Appearing in sixteen translations, among them German, Dutch, Swedish, Hungarian, Russian, and Greek, it was constantly in print until 1830.[503] The *Avis*, written in plain language in the vernacular, emerged as a direct result of Tissot's work with rural Swiss peasants, and was designed specifically to enable community leaders–such as parish ministers–to take a more active role in fostering the well being of their parishioners.[504] It also allowed suffering individuals themselves to take a more direct role in their care by offering them concrete ways of shaping their experiences in order to make them comprehensible for medical professionals.[505] By outlining the barriers to societal well being and proposing concrete solutions to endemic problems, Tissot's work introduced the idea of public health as a relevant issue of civic concern.

---

[502] Samuel-Auguste-André-David Tissot, *Avis au peuple sur sa santé*, 1761, 2 vols. (Paris: P.-F. Didot le jeune, 1782).

[503] Antoinette Emch-Dériaz, "L'enseignement clinique au XVIIIe siècle: l'exemple de Tissot," *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History/Bulletin canadien d'histoire de la médecine* 4 (1987): 463, n.43.

[504] Tissot was appointed Lausanne's "médecin des pauvres" in 1752.

[505] "Il faut beaucoup d'attention et d'habitude, pour bien juger de l'état d'un malade qu'on ne voit pas, lors même qu'on est instruit aussi-bien qu'on peut l'être de loin, mais cette difficulté est fort augmentée, et même changée en impossibilité, quand l'information n'est pas exacte....C'est pour prévenir cet inconvénient, que je joins ici une liste des questions auxquelles il faut pouvoir répondre"(Tissot, *Avis*, 2:325).

In Paris, discussions about public health took on even greater urgency in 1773, as the city came to terms with the extensive damage wrought by a devastating week-long fire to the Hôtel-Dieu.[506] The effects of the fire brought the conditions in the hospital into high relief. As Dora B. Weiner observes, "The murderous overcrowding at the Hôtel-Dieu and the neglect of safety in its layout and storage of inflammable materials became topics of daily discussion."[507] The founding, in 1776, of the *Société royale de médecine*, for the express purpose of co-ordinating an organized effort towards the prevention of human and animal disease, offered further opportunities for critical reflection.[508] A surge in small-scale hospital projects in the 1770s and 1780s included not only Suzanne Necker's experimental *Hospice de charité*, founded in 1778 by a royal edict, but also the Vaugirard Hospital, which offered a revolutionary treatment for infants born with venereal disease, and the tiny six-bed Protestant Hospital run by the Swedish embassy; these all represented concrete movement towards improving the situation.[509]

Suzanne Necker was a committed participant in the public health movement. Not only was she a patient subject to the travails of corporeal fallibility, but she was also an influential philanthropist in the area of hospital reform and an avid reader and consumer of medical texts and treatises. A friend of Tissot's from the period immediately preceding her marriage, she maintained a close relationship with him and received copies of his latest publications, which she read with great interest. In

---

[506] Dora B.Weiner, *The Citizen-Patient in Revolutionary and Imperial Paris* (Baltimore, USA: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 31.

[507] Weiner, *Citizen-Patient*, 31.

[508] Terence D. Murphy, "The French Medical Profession's Perception of Its Social Function between 1776 and 1830," *Journal of Medical History* 23 (1979): 260.

[509] Weiner, *Citizen-Patient*, 37; 40.

Tissot's work, Madame Necker perceived the beneficent union of faith and public duty on behalf of "l'humanité souffrante" and was singularly impressed with its moral implications. "On se croit et on se sent presque Médecin et philosophe aprèz vous avoir lû," she wrote, "et heureusement on est en même tems plus vertueux et mieux pourtant."[510]

Suzanne Necker's involvement in Parisian hospital reform offers one striking example of her commitment to addressing the medical and moral needs of the poor and suffering in her community. She was horrified by the squalid conditions of Parisian hospitals,[511] in particular the *Hôtel Dieu*, whose patients had to share beds, up to seven in a single bed.[512] In addition to this, the hospital was, from Madame Necker's perspective, inefficiently managed. In response, she proposed an experimental charity hospital governed by the dual principles of hygiene and economy.[513] The 120-bed *Hospice de Charité*, located in the parishes of Saint-Sulpice and Gros-Caillou, opened in 1778. Directed by Madame Necker and a local parish

---

[510] Curchod Necker, Letter to Samuel-Auguste-André-David Tissot, ce samedi matin, ms.suppl. 1909, Fonds Eynard, BGE.

[511] "Ces monumens d'humanité sont devenus, en plusieurs endroits, des monumens d'indifférence & presque de barbarie" (Curchod Necker, *Hospice de charité. Institutions, règles et usages de cette Maison*, ii).

[512] Curchod Necker, *Nouveaux Mélanges*, 2:304. Diderot, in the previously cited passage on the *Hôtel Dieu*, recalls "trois, quatre, cinq & six dans un même lit" (Diderot, "Hôtel-Dieu," 8:319).

[513] For more insight into Necker's hospital reform and the history of the *Hospice de charité*, see Raymond Gervais, *Histoire de l'Hôpital Necker (1778-1885)* (Paris, 1885); Jacques René Cotinat, *La Fondation et les débuts de l'hôpital Necker à Paris (Paris, 1972)*, work which is summarized in M. Poisvert, "Les débuts de l'hôpital Necker," *Histoire des sciences médicales* 7 (1973): 315-26; Louis S. Greenbaum, "Jacques Necker and the Reform of the Paris Hospitals Before the French Revolution," *Eighteenth-Century Life* IX:1 (1984): 1-15; Alexandre Aimes, "Le séjour de Madame Necker à Montpellier: Fondation de l'hôpital Necker de Montpellier," *Histoire des sciences médicales* 8 (1974): 477-89; Lucette Pérol, "Diderot, Mme Necker et la réforme des hôpitaux," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 311 (1993): 219-33; Valérie Hannin, "La fondation de l'hospice de charité: une expérience médicale au temps du rationalisme expérimental," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 31:1 (1984): 116-30; and Sonja Boon, "Performing the Woman of Sensibility: Suzanne Curchod Necker and the *Hospice de charité*," *Journal of Eighteenth-Century Studies*, forthcoming.

curate, Jean Joseph Faydit de Terssac, and managed by Soeur Cassegrain, one of twelve Sisters of Charity employed by the hospital, it offered medical care to the suffering but morally-sound poor of the community.[514] Patients, one to a bed, recuperated in well-aired rooms, cared for by a staff that included a resident doctor and surgeon.[515] Madame Necker directed the project for more than ten years, from its inception in 1778 until her departure from France in 1790.[516] Throughout this period, she oversaw its activities and produced annual published reports which included detailed financial accounts and medical statistics.[517]

The annual reports were a prime opportunity for Madame Necker to display the principles of her Calvinist faith. Indeed, her substantial introductions are a testament to the broader ideas that underpinned her reformed belief. Particularly evident is her understanding of herself as part of a larger community of individuals and her responsibility, as a wealthy woman of faith, to respond to the needs and concerns of the less fortunate. Necker's gesture can be understood as a mobilization of her spiritual sensibility, an active engagement with the physical sufferings of others in order to fulfill the requirements of Calvinist duty and to achieve spiritual

---

[514] Madame Necker noted that admission to the hospital had to be carefully scrutinized, particularly given its size limitations. Potential patients were screened in order to weed out potential thieves who sought to evade justice,"fainéans"–or lazy, good-for-nothings–who used illness as a pretext for not working, and miserly individuals who were able to pay for medical care, but chose instead to seek medical attention at the expense of the poor (Curchod Necker, *Hospice de charité: Institutions, règles et usages de cette maison*, 21). Potential patients were required to submit a "certificat de pauvreté," signed by the parish priests or Soeur Cassegrain (Curchod Necker, *Hospice de charité, Institution, règles et usages de cette Maison*, 6).

[515] Curchod Necker, *Nouveaux Mélanges*, 2:302-303.

[516] There is also some suggestion that she wanted to expand its mandate (and physical structures) to include the care of abandoned children. See Curchod Necker, Letter to M. de Chéry, 11 7bre 1780, N.A.F. 2766, BNF, where she writes about: "un nouveau bâtiment que je fais faire à l'hospice. ce bâtiment est destiné à essayer d'élever des enfans trouvés avec du lait de Vache."

[517] See [Curchod Necker], *Hospice de charité*; [Suzanne Curchod Necker], *Hospice de charité: institutions, règles, et usages de cette*; and the prefaces to the two final accounts, which are included in Curchod Necker, *Nouveaux mélanges*, 2:299-316. See also the account written in 1788 by the first doctor of the hospice: François Doublet, *Hospice de Charité, Année 1788*.

communion.[518] While the project was conceived under the rational principles of economic efficiency and hygiene, it was governed by a sensibility deeply informed by religious belief. By suggesting that the poor and indigent of her community "sont l'autel vivant, destiné par un dieu de bonté à recevoir les seules offrandes et le seul hommage qui puisse atteindre jusqu'à lui,"[519] and further, that individuals of wealth and learning had a duty to respond to their sufferings,[520] Madame Necker drew upon a number of Calvinist assumptions: among them, that suffering was intrinsic to the human condition, that Calvinist practices required active commitment and involvement in one's own salvation through the provision of good to others, that wealth and learning could–and should–be mobilized in the service of divine grace, and that, at a fundamental level, humanity was not made up of a series of disconnected individuals, but constituted an inherently interrelated and interdependent community.[521]

Madame Necker's decision to become directly involved with the provision of public charity differed markedly from the precepts promoted in contemporaneous conduct books. Her approach contrasts, for example, with that recommended in the

---

[518] Louis de Jaucourt, the Huguenot author of the article "Sensibilité (morale)," in the *Encyclopédie*, defines sensibility as that "disposition tendre & délicate de l'âme, qui la rend facile à être touchée...la sensibilité est la mère de l'humanité, de la générosité; elle sert d mérite, secourt l'esprit, & entraîne la persuasion à sa suite" (Louis de Jaucourt, "Sensibilité (morale)," in *Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (Paris: 1751-80), 15:52).

[519] Curchod Necker, *Nouveaux Mélanges*, 2:312.

[520] Madame Necker argued that the state of hospitals in France left much to be desired. In addition to this, "plus cette observation est douloureuse, plus elle doit nous attendrir sur le sort de cette classe d'hommes ignorans et dénués de tout, qui, jetés comme au hasard sur la terre, ne peuvent y subsister longtems sans y être accueillis et maintenus par la sollicitude attentive des riches, et des hommes instruites" (Curchod Necker, *Nouveaux Mélanges*, 2:311).

[521] These thoughts are echoed in Jacques Necker's 1781 *Compte Rendu*. This work, while mainly an account of the fiscal state of the French nation, also included a personal tribute to Suzanne Necker, in which Jacques Necker emphasized the gendered attributes of charitable endeavours and highlighted the importance of the married unit (Jacques Necker, *Compte Rendu au Roy* [Paris: Imprimerie royale, 1781], 103).

1730 publication, *Conduite d'une dame chrétienne pour vivre saintement dans le monde*, a conduct book designed specifically for French Catholic women.[522] Here the author, Duguet, counselled strict adherence to the womanly virtues of modesty and humility and argued for moderation in the practice of one's civic obligations. While he did not doubt his readers' commitment to the needs of the poor, he nevertheless recommended a cautious approach, writing:

> Vous allez quelquefois à l'Hôtel-Dieu servir le manger aux malades & aux autres pauvres; & c'est ordinairement aux grandes fêtes. Je voudrois que ce fût un peu plus souvent: mais ne vous gênez point. Quand je dis souvent, je n'entends qu'une fois le mois.[523]

Necker's 'hands-on' approach represented a completely different kind of intervention. The twinned aspirations of economic security and moral fortitude, which blossomed on the very public stage of French politics, were honed through her many years of private and quiet sponsorship of impoverished Swiss family members and friends. Her support and direction of the *Hospice de Charité* represented a large-scale act of *bienfaisance*, enacted on the stage of French pre-revolutionary politics and in the full gaze of Parisian public opinion.

Necker's role in the area of public health should not be underestimated. Her work in hospital reform set the stage for the development by others of further hospitals founded on the same model, among them a tiny six-bed project bearing her name and designed for the care of indigent protestants in Montpellier.[524] In addition

---

[522] Duguet, *Conduite d'une dame chrétienne pour vivre saintement dans le monde*, 3rd Ed. (Paris: Jacques Estienne, 1730).

[523] Duguet, *Dame chrétienne*, 161.

[524] For more on the Montpellier project, see Alexandre Aimes, "Le séjour de Madame Necker à Montpellier: Fondation de l'hôpital Necker de Montpellier," *Histoire des sciences médicales* 8 (1974): 477-89.

to this, her work set in motion the development of a large variety of charitable initiatives led by the French monied elite.[525]

Suzanne Necker was also active on other fronts. Malady, postulated in the *Encyclopédie* as the intermediary space between life and death,[526] was an area which required public commitment: not only did society have a responsibility to respond to the desperate plight of its ailing members,[527] but it also needed to closely consider its collective purpose as "le protecteur des mourans."[528] In 1790, in addition to her work with the *Hospice de charité*, Madame Necker published a treatise and policy proposal on premature burial. She was also a member of the *Société de la charité maternelle*, a Parisian philanthropic organization founded in 1788. In each of these cases, Madame Necker positioned herself on the side of the suffering populace, entreating society as a whole to make the plight of the less fortunate a central social and civic concern.

Central to the improvement efforts initiated by Tissot and carried forward by Necker, Tenon, and others, was the idea of hygiene. Defined in the *Encyclopédie* as a medical method that enabled the conservation of health and well being,[529] hygiene encompassed not only physical gestures, but also moral behaviours. Thus doctors and other medical professionals took a multi-layered approach which focussed on

---

[525] For more information on the development of the charitable imperative in late eighteenth and early nineteenth- century Paris, see Catherine Duprat, *"Pour l'amour de l'humanité": Le temps des philanthropes. La philanthropie parisienne des Lumières à la monarchie de Juillet*, Vol. 1 (Paris, France: Éditions du C.T.H.S., 1993).

[526] "Maladie," in *Encyclopédie*, 9:929.

[527] "Peut-on voir, sans être ému de compassion, des hommes entassés dans un même lit, abadonnés à une mal-propreté qui révolte les sens les plus grossiers, & constraints à respirer un air corrompu qui détruit l'effet de tous les remèdes?" ([Curchod Necker], *Institutions, règles et usages*, 3).

[528] Suzanne Curchod Necker, *Des inhumations précipitées* (Paris: Imprimerie du roy, 1790), 7.

[529] "Hygiène," *Encyclopédie*, 8:385-388.

such issues as air quality, nutrition, rest and movement, sleep, fluxes and secretions, and finally, "les passions de l'âme."[530] Suzanne Necker stressed the healthy environment of the *Hospice de charité*, by outlining the project's commitment to caring for patients in single beds placed in well-aired rooms.[531] She also reflected on the moral nature of the project itself, putting the focus directly on what she perceived as society's lack of concern for the poor and indigent members of society.[532]

The language of medicine was deeply implicated in social and cultural reforms of the period. The eighteenth-century emphasis on medical and moral hygiene was fully deployed in the service of public health and well-being, forming the basis of a discourse on social responsibility and cultural obligation in which each individual had a moral duty to ensure not only his or her personal well-being, but the fitness of society as a whole.[533] Building on ideas put forward by medical practitioners trained in the Montpellier vitalist school, doctors and civic leaders advocated an approach which defined health as a position of felicitous equilibrium; in other words, a state of being in which all aspects of lived experience–moral, intellectual, and physical–were in balance. Equilibrium offered optimal efficiency, providing a smooth, well-oiled psychic and corporeal frame that was ideally capable of supporting all of the healthy individual's activities and undertakings. The state of equilibrium could, however, be compromised by any number of events. The cultivation and maintenance of the

---

[530] "Hygiene," *Encyclopédie*, 8:386.

[531] [Curchod Necker], *Institutions, règles et usages*, 4.

[532] In her preface to the 1781 accounts, Madame Necker expressed her discouragement at the number of obstacles to making the project a success, and commended the parish priests for their persistence. See [Curchod Necker], *Hospice 1781*, 5).

[533] Michael Winston argues that eighteenth-century meliorist debates foreshadowed the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century eugenics movements. See Michael E. Winston, *From Perfectibility to Perversion: Meliorism in Eighteenth-Century France* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005).

healthy body and mind therefore required the individual's complete and undivided attention.

Tissot, in presenting the simple peasant as the model of health, suggested that individual well being was the result of a balanced life lived in simplicity rather than excess. He recommended regular exercise together with a healthy diet low in fats, sugars, and spices. In addition to this, he cautioned against the dangers of alcohol, coffee, and hot chocolate.[534] Again, Suzanne Necker's *Hospice* presented a sterling model of efficiency and hygiene. Its annual reports, produced by the medical and nursing staff and prefaced by Madame Necker herself, are models of statistical clarity which outline in detail not only the patients, illnesses, and mortality rates, but also the consumption rates and cost of food and wine.[535]

Integral to the discourse of hygiene and social fitness was the relationship between the idea of public health, which, as Ludmilla Jordanova points out, referred to the philanthropic efforts undertaken by the elite classes on behalf of the impoverished and disenfranchised labouring classes,[536] and individual embodied experience and responsibility. In other words, the process of public reflection on the nature of civic responsibility and national well being engendered an equal process of individual reflection and an intimate awareness of the subjective experience of the lived-in body.

---

[534] Samuel-Auguste-André-David Tissot, *Essai sur les maladies des gens du monde* (Lausanne: François Grasset et Comp., 1770), 12; 25.

[535] See [Curchod Necker], *Hospice 1781*. For more details surrounding the hospice as a rational experiment, see Valérie Hannin, "La fondation de l'hospice de charité: une expérience médicale au temps du rationalisme expérimental," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 31.1 (1984): 116-130

[536] Ludmilla Jordanova, "Policing Public Health in France, 1780-1815," in *Nature Displayed: Gender, Science and Medicine, 1760-1820* (London, UK and New York, USA: Addison Wesley Longman Limited, 1999), 149.

The letters exchanged between Suzanne Necker and Antoine-Léonard Thomas offer one example of the ways in which subjective embodied experience was understood and displayed. In this correspondence, the shared subjective experience of illness is evoked as a performative gesture. By sharing their maladies, Thomas and Necker transformed the letter into a stage upon which they engaged in a performance of corporeality. In 1781, Thomas thanked Necker for her concern for and interest in his sister's health and outlined her medical progress. This recitation subsequently functioned as a springboard for his own interest in Necker's well-being: "C'est de votre santé que le frère et la soeur s'occupent dans ce moment beaucoup plus que de la leur," he argued, turning the focus back onto Madame Necker, "Vous avez à réparer cinq années de peines et de travaux,[537] qui vous ont ôté autant de forces qu'ils vous ont laissé de gloire."[538] In these letters, illness was understood as a shared experience and as a way of bringing individuals together.[539] It was through this communal experience of human suffering that Suzanne and her friends were able to access their sensibility, and from this sensibility, to recognize and respond to their duties.

This subjective experience initiated dialogue on a completely different level. Where the prime negotiations had formerly taken place between the doctor and the ailing body, new relationships came to the fore: the first, between the patient and the

---

[537] Given the date of this letter, I would suggest that the "cinq années" refers to Necker's leadership of the *Hospice de Charité*. While the institution opened in 1778, her interest in hospital reform was already evident a number of years earlier, and formed one of the reasons behind her 1776 journey to Great Britain. For more on the Necker family's 1776 trip, see Louis S. Greenbaum, "Jacques Necker and the Reform of the Paris Hospitals Before the French Revolution," *Eighteenth-Century Life*, IX: 1 (1984): 1-15 and Comtesse Jeanne de Panges, "Necker en Angleterre: Le mystérieux voyage de 1776," *La Revue des Deux Mondes* (1948): 480-99.

[538] Thomas, Letter to Suzanne Curchod Necker, "A Auteuil, ce 15 septembre 1781," in Thomas, *Oeuvres complètes*, 6:262.

[539] In this sense, illness takes on the characteristics of *politesse*, as outlined in the first chapter.

lived-in body, and the second, between the patient and the spectators, be they doctors, friends, colleagues, or others. This process of self-reflection enabled a sentimental culture of narcissistic display, in which the subjective experience of illness, related in texts by patients and sufferers, became a central element of autobiographical presentation.

Jean-Pierre Peter posits the ailing body as a theatre for the display of illness and suffering, a perspective which offers intriguing insights into eighteenth-century medical culture.[540] Such a postulation suggests a direct collusion between the patient and the medical establishment and accords authority over the body not only to the medical professional but also, significantly, to the patient.[541]

In a culture of display, the patient's body performs a dual function: the displayed body was also, at once, the displaying body.[542] The corporeal structure manifested its illnesses, which patients catalogued and codified in detailed letters to medical professionals, revealing previously hidden interior experiences of malady, and inviting the onlooker to participate in and engage with the signs and messages of the ailing corporeal shell. Suzanne Necker's writings demonstrate that some patients were fully aware of the performative power of their illnesses and of their potential in the context of interpersonal relationships. By invoking corporeal distress, Necker anticipated a response which conformed to the principles of a dialogic relationship; in

---

[540] Jean-Pierre Peter, "Entre femmes et medecins," 343.

[541] For more on the agency of the eighteenth-century patient, see Barbara Duden, *The Woman Beneath the Skin: A Doctor's Patients in Eighteenth Century Germany*, (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1991) and Séverine Pilloud, "Mettre les maux en mots, médiations dans la consultation épistolaire au XVIIIe siècle: les malades du Dr. Tissot (1728-1797)," *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History/Bulletin canadien d'histoire de la médecine* 16 (1999): 215-45.

[542] Recall that this idea of display was a fundamental understanding the mirroring imperative of elite sociable behaviour.

other words, her narrative of illness stimulated her correspondents' duties and imposed a concomitant response: "ma maladie me devient chère," wrote Madame Necker, "par l'intérêt que vous daignez y prendre."[543]

In a culture where much medical consultation took place by correspondence, the performative body took centre stage. One prime example of this process can be found in the correspondence between Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Tissot. In a long letter to the famous doctor, Rousseau described a variety of physical ailments in great detail.[544] However, Rousseau's recitation had a doubly performative function: in textually displaying his body and the sufferings to which it was subject, he invited the participation of a broader audience, one which extended even beyond the gaze of his doctor. "Mettez, Monsieur, cette maladie dans vos registres si vous jugez qu'elle en vaille la peine," he wrote, "et puisse-t-elle vous fournir quelque reflexions instructives soit pour la conservation de cette courte et misérable vie humaine, soit pour apprendre de plus en plus aux hommes à ne l'estimer que ce qu'elle vaut."[545] Within a social and cultural framework in which the workings of the internal body were only just beginning to open themselves to the medical gaze, Rousseau's gesture rendered the opacity of the lived-in body completely transparent. The suffering body was put on complete display: open to the public gaze, it was offered to the scrutiny of medical science, a specimen of corporeal suffering laid out for the eager spectator.

---

[543] Curchod Necker, Letter to Etienette Clavel de Brenles, Paris, 7 novembre 1765, IS1915/xxx/h/1, BCUL; see also Golowkin, *Lettres diverses*, 267.

[544] The correspondence between Rousseau and Tissot can be found in Alexis François, "Correspondance de Jean-Jacques Rousseau et du médecin Tissot," *Annales de la société Jean-Jacques Rousseau* VII (1911): 19-40.

[545] François, "Rousseau et Tissot," 36.

While only the *dossiers de consultation* offer the kind of detail contained in Rousseau's letter, personal correspondence of the period nonetheless included frequent references to ailments of a variety of sorts. The individual's intimate and subjective experience of illness operated within a larger cultural and social matrix of doctor/patient relations, in which suffering conferred not only social acceptance, but further, social desirability. The elite body, posited by Tissot as an inherently sick body, was also a treated body. Subject to the gaze of the celebrity doctor, it revelled in illness and basked in reflected social glory.[546] Illness came to define the elite body in much the same way as the art of conversation defined the elite *esprit*. Illness, thus performed and displayed through discourse, became a central aspect of the elite identity, a mark of acculturation that conferred membership in a select–and clearly identifiable–social category. So it was that Rousseau sought the advice of Tissot and that elite women such as Madame d'Epinay and Madame de Vermenoux travelled to Geneva to spend months and even years under the care of Théodore Tronchin.[547] To this extent, Suzanne Necker's myriad illnesses can be understood as integral to the culture of which she was a part. A closer examination, however, discloses undercurrents that suggest new possibilities for understanding the intimate experience of illness during the eighteenth century.

---

[546] See, for example, Séverine Pilloud, "Tourisme médical à Lausanne dans la seconde moitié du XVIIIe siècle," *Revue historique vaudoise* 114 (2006): 9-23, who observes that: "[le tourisme médical] génère...une véritable vie de cour ou de salon, où il est de bon ton d'être vu en compagnie des grands du monde. Tissot faisait incontestablement partie de ceux-ci..." (23).

[547] The rise of the celebrity doctor during the eighteenth century might be attributed to a number of factors, among them a general increase in mobility and expansion of literacy rates, which gave patients direct contact, through text, with doctors, and the decision to publish medical texts in the vernacular, rather than in Latin, as had previously been the case.

Séverine Pilloud and Micheline Louis-Courvoisier provide a compelling framework for understanding doctor/patient relationships during this period.[548] Focusing directly on the 1300 extant *dossiers de consultation* written to Tissot during his lifetime, they posit a complex relationship between what they perceive as exterior and interior medical experiences; in other words, between that which can be grasped by observers–the element of corporeal experience subject to and codified by the external gaze–and that which exists only in the domain of the patient, that remains invisible to the external gaze and needs to be formally articulated either orally or in writing.[549] They argue that this formal process of exteriorization, undertaken either by the patient or by a close family member, local physician, or religious leader, was integral to the doctor/patient relationship and accorded significant authority to the ailing patient. As Pilloud and Louis-Courvoisier demonstrate, exteriorization was a conscious gesture specifically enacted in order to assert the authority of subjective understandings and to claim ownership of personal suffering and lived experience. Each of Tissot's patients, well aware of the cultural dominance of the medical gaze and its implicit authority to diagnose and define the experience of illness, chose to lay claim to his or her own telling of the story. In so doing, they wrested authorship away from the medical profession, otherwise entrusted with the narratives of sickness and health. The words of one Monsieur Thomasin are particularly revealing

---

[548] Séverine Pilloud and Micheline Louis-Courvoisier, "The Intimate Experience of the Body in the Eighteenth Century: Between Interiority and Exteriority," *Journal of Medical History* 47 (2003): 451-72.

[549] In *Disembodying Women: Perspectives on Pregnancy and the Unborn*, trans. Lee Hoinacki (Cambridge, USA and London, UK: Harvard University Press, 1993), Barbara Duden makes a similar argument by pointing to the skin as the natural barrier between interior and exterior experiences of the body (44). She also takes this analysis further, arguing that the use of medical technology to gain access to the internal–and unseen–workings of the body might be conceived as a form of "skinning" which wholly undermines the subjective, felt experiences of the patient (77-78).

in this regard. "Ma maladie est intérieure, il n'y a que moi qui la sente," he insisted, "j'ai cru aussi qu'il n'y avoit que moi qui put la décrire; c'est pourqoui je ne prends point pour interprete quelque docteur de la faculté, qui en se servant de termes de l'art, m'expliqueroit peut-être moins bien que ne fera mon foible jargon."[550]

But the subjective experience of illness–that dialogue between the suffering individual and the lived-in body that extended out to the enlightened gaze of the medical spectator–could also be taken further. From this perspective, illness was not debilitating, but could also be perceived as nourishing, in that the ownership of illness functioned as the impetus for heightened emotional and intellectual awareness. The various corporeal sufferings of François-Marie Arouet de Voltaire offer perhaps the most notable example of the performative potential of illness. Indeed, the self-styled "vieux malade de Ferney"[551] spent many years under the care of the celebrated Théodore Tronchin. Voltaire is best known, however, for his particular ability to use the performance of illness as a conduit in the service of artistic and romantic creativity. In a 1773 letter to Suzanne Necker, he explored the implications of the blindness of her associate, Madame du Deffand, observing that, "La privation des yeux n'ôte rien à l'esprit de société, rend l'âme plus attentive, et augmente même l'imagination."[552] It is clear from Voltaire's words that illness was not perceived as entirely disabling; in fact, the sick body could function as a site in which other senses were heightened, so that the sick individual could have more access to deeper states of being.

---

[550] Cited in Pilloud, "Maux en mots," 231.

[551] Voltaire signed many of his letters to the Clavel de Brenles family this way. See, for example, the letters contained in dossier IS1915/xxx/h/1, BCUL.

[552] François Marie Arouet de Voltaire, *The Complete Works of Voltaire*, ed. Theodore Besterman, vol. 124 (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1975), 220.

This belief also appeared in the context of his own life. Deidre Dawson, looking closely at the epistolary relationship between Voltaire and his lover and niece, Madame Denis, observes a relationship characterized by and understood through the writing of illness. In this epistolary exchange, physical trauma enhanced the nature of Voltaire's desire, so that "the passion [was] metaphorized into an illness."[553] Corporeal suffering was not disabling, but enabling, providing a stimulus for the performance of amorous passion. Illness was deployed as an erotic gesture, a way of linking Voltaire to his beloved Madame Denis.

Thus, while it remains important to critically examine the nature of the power relationships that informed doctor/patient relationships during this period, relationships which gave credence to the construction of women's bodies as naturally ill, for example, it is equally important to look at the ways in which individuals negotiated these prescriptions on a subjective level. The lived-in body, located at the meeting point between the authority and institutional power of the medical gaze and imagined, personal experience, must be envisioned as a fundamentally troubled entity that acts on its own behalf even as it is acted upon.

Philippe Rieder and Vincent Barras postulate an active and dynamic patient who was fully immersed in her physical experience and directly involved in her medical care. In an almost seductive move, this patient courted medical opinion through the act of sharing physical infirmities, actively drawing the medical gaze into her internal bodily experience. Such a patient, Rieder and Barras suggest, was hardly the mute, passive, gazed-upon entity theorized by Foucault. Rather:

---

[553] Deidre Dawson, "Voltaire's Complaint: Illness and Eroticism in *La Correspondance*," *Literature and Medicine* 18.1 (1999): 34.

> Le patient doit être pensé autrement: un personnage qui... constitue une figure dynamique, en interaction à la fois avec son propre passé, avec son entourage, avec les professionnels de la santé, et avec le savoir médical de son temps.[554]

This patient negotiated the exterior and interior gaze with aplomb, crafting an autobiographical experience of illness which meshed neatly with medical and cultural understandings of the day.

This, almost certainly, was the framework in which Suzanne Necker experienced her illnesses. As a patient of both Tissot and Tronchin, an avid reader of medical literature, and a committed philanthropist in the area of hospital reform, she was thoroughly embedded in the principles of the external gaze. She was also, at the same time, through her correspondence and private writings, the author of her own illnesses. In full command of the discursive evocation of her suffering, she both acquiesced to and reveled in the emotional and sentimental power of disease over her life experiences.

In order to more fully appreciate the slippage between subjective embodied knowledge and the institutional authority of the medical gaze, I turn to a discussion of Madame Necker's understanding of the relationship between illness and performance. More specifically, I examine the link between malady and sensibility as they played themselves out on the female body, and subsequently, in Madame Necker's case, on the Calvinist body.

---

[554] Philip Rieder and Vincent Barras, "Écrire sa maladie au siècle des Lumières," in *La médecine des Lumières: tout autour de Tissot*, eds. Vincent Barras and Micheline Louis-Courvoisier (Geneva, Switzerland and Paris, France: Georg Editeur, 2001), 205.

Pathologizing Women: Vitalism, Illness, and Gender

On the sixth of April, 1773, Suzanne Necker remarked to a friend that while, "le temps et la santé me manquent tous les jours, ma sensibilité seule est inépuisable."[555] In this statement Necker acknowledged not only the frantic pace required by her public roles as *salonnière* and political wife, but also the deep relationships between illness, sensibility, and female experience. For Madame Necker, illness functioned as a channel for her sensibility, a way to engage with the most personal aspects of her being, and, from there, to engage more fully and more deeply with the physical and moral sufferings of others. Illness was, finally, a vehicle through which she could express the full extent of her psychic distress and feelings of culpability. Madame Necker defined cultural, religious, and filial alterity through malady. As such, the interplay between psychic and somatic markers of illness functioned as integral aspects of Suzanne Necker's conception of self.

Madame Necker's experiences were directly informed by the emergence of medical vitalism.[556] The vitalist perspective fundamentally transformed medical and moral understandings of the body. By positing an interconnected psychic and corporeal system, vitalists theorized sensibility as an active agent and argued for a holistic understanding of the individual. As a result, the body was no longer

---

[555] Curchod Necker, Letter to Etienette Clavel de Brenles, le 6 avril 1773, IS1915/xxx/h/1 BCUL; see also Golowkin, *Lettres diverses*, 415-16.

[556] Vitalism, a medical movement which originated some time around the middle of the eighteenth century at the Faculty of Medicine in Montpellier, moved away from anatomical and humoral understandings of the body by positing the body as a vital-living, moving, dynamic-entity created of multiple parts which were all intimately linked through the property of sensibility. For more insight into Montpellier vitalism, see the following works by Elizabeth A. Williams: *A Cultural History of Medical Vitalism in Enlightenment Montpellier* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2003); *The Physical and the Moral: Anthropology, Physiology, and Philosophical Medicine in France, 1750-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); "Hysteria and the Court Physician in Enlightenment France," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 35.2 (2002): 247-55.

understood as a static entity, but rather as a dynamic process. In contrast to the work of anatomists, which relied on static understandings of the body, vitalist philosophy posited a body that was continually in process and organized through a series of constantly mobile inter-relationships. Physical and mental disease were intrinsically connected, the vitalists argued, the health of one dependent wholly upon the health and fitness of the other.

Vitalist *médecins philosophes* understood the body as an entity constructed of multiple individual parts, impulses, and ideas, each of which was intimately linked to the other by a sensitive and nuanced nervous system. Integral to vitalist thought was the desire to bridge the gap between the Cartesian mind and body, a move beyond the purely mechanist understanding of the body as a system apart from the mind. In the vitalist framework, the mind acted upon the body as much as the body acted upon the mind, thus laying the groundwork for psychic trauma to become manifest in the form of physical distress.

The inter-relationships central to the vitalist model were made possible by the idea of sensibility, which was seen as a mediating or bridging quality facilitating the interaction between psyche and soma.[557] While such a fluid interplay was generally perceived as beneficent, it was equally perceived as threatening: left unchecked, sensibility metamorphosed into dangerous instability.

The work of Diderot, in particular his controversial *Le rêve de d'Alembert*, is illustrative in this regard. Diderot posited the body as a dynamic entity, envisaging the

[557] Vitalists, as Elizabeth Williams suggests, "luxuriated in the passional origins of disease, which functioned as the most persuasive proof available of the soul's direct action on the body" (Williams, *Cultural History*, 235).

nervous system as a network or bundle connected by an infinite number of threads which "vibrate [and] transmit to the common centre a multitude of sensations often discordant, disconnected and muddled."[558] While sensibility animated the threads and enabled the networks, Diderot also observed that it was a volatile quality whose power had to be mediated by the logical operations of the rational control centre. To invert this relationship, Diderot warned, was to invite chaos: the system as a whole was threatened with disarray if the individual threads attempted to control the centre. The worrying imagery of the network in complete disarray suggests the social dangers inherent to the vitalist model of indeterminacy. Indeed, if the coherence of the individual body could be threatened by excessive sensibility, how much more damaging might be the impact of rampant sensibility on society as a whole.

This fraught relationship between beneficence and volatility lay at the heart of vitalist medical thought, particularly in the areas concerning women.[559] Regularly evoked by vitalist *médecins philosophes* such as Pierre Pomme and Théodore Raulin, the perception of a direct link between women and emotional instability reached its apogee in Pierre Roussel's immensely influential 1775 work, the *Système physique et moral de la femme ou Tableau philosophique de la constitution, des moeurs et des fonctions propres au sexe*.[560] According to these practitioners, a woman was, as

---

[558] Denis Diderot, *Rameau's nephew and D'Alembert's dream*, trans. L.W. Tancock (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1966), 214.

[559] Vitalist postulations about women, a collusion between medicine and morality, demonstrate the extent to which the idea of sensibility could be medicalized, and, at the same time, the extent to which medicine was influenced by cultural tradition.

[560] Pierre Pomme, *Traité des affections vapoureuses des deux* sexes, 2nd ed. (Lyon: Benoit Duplain, 1765); Joseph Raulin, *Traité des affections vapoureuses du sexe* (Paris: Jean-Thomas Hérissant, 1758); Pierre Roussel, *Système physique et moral de la femme ou Tableau philosophique de la constitution, des moeurs et des fonctions propres au sexe* (Paris: Vincent, 1775).

Jean-Pierre Peter has suggested: "malade parce que femme."[561] Indeed, contemporaneous thinkers regularly associated women with pathology. Within such a system of belief, Madame Necker's hyper-sensibility–her ability to intimately experience the emotional and physical states of those around her–manifested itself in the form of continual illness.[562]

A discussion of the relationship between vitalist medicine, sensibility, and the female body is necessary in order to understand the impact of vitalist thought on Suzanne Necker's experience and understanding of illness. At a basic level, vitalist understandings of sensibility were not explicitly gendered. Indeed, while women suffered from *hystérie*, men suffered from *hypochondrie*. Both "vaporous" ailments appeared to manifest themselves in a series of bizarre and erratic behaviors, and both disorders were seen as the product of immoderate lives of luxury and excess. In this respect class, not gender, was a pre-condition for nervous ailments: the *vapeurs* appeared in fact to emerge only within the elite classes resident in the nation's capital, Paris. As Suzanne Necker observed of her own sufferings, "ma foiblesse tient je crois a une maladie de femme assez commune dans ce pays et inconnuë dans le nôtre."[563] Nervous disorders were imputed to lives of idleness, debauchery, and over-

---

[561] Jean-Pierre Peter, "Entre femmes et medecins. Violence et singularités dans les discours du corps et sur le corps d'après les manuscrits médicaus de la fin du XVIIIe siècle," *Ethnologie française* VI.3-4 (1976): 342.

[562] For more on the relationships between sensibility and illness, see the work of Anne C. Vila, in particular: Vila, "Beyond Sympathy: Vapors, Melancholia, and the Pathologies of Sensibility in Tissot and Rousseau." *Yale French Studies* 92 (1997): 88-101; Vila, *Enlightenment and Pathology: Sensibility in the Literature and Medicine of Eighteenth-Century France* (Baltimore, USA: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Vila, "Reading the "Sensible" Body: Medicine, Philosophy, and Semiotics in Eighteenth-Century France," in *Data Made Flesh: Embodying Information*, ed. Robert Mitchell and Phillip Thurtle (New York, USA: Routledge, 2004), 27-45; and Vila, "Sex and Sensibility: Pierre Roussel's Système physique et moral de la femme," *Representations* 52 (1995): 76-93.

[563] Curchod Necker, Letter to Henriette Réverdil, ce 21 7bre [1771], ms.suppl. 717, BGE.

consumption, since physical excess could directly influence the nervous system.[564] The sensible body could not be divorced from its surroundings, as it was at once a product of individual intellectual and larger-scale social phenomena, and a catalyst for them.

Nevertheless vitalist physicians seeking to understand and define the nature and scope of female corporeal volatility identified gender, and not class, as inherently problematic to individual well being. More specifically, vitalists believed that sensibility served to highlight the already fraught relationship between the concepts of "woman" and "body." Women's natural emotional capacity for sensibility, when combined with emergent understandings regarding the radical potential of a sensible and sensitive body, was assumed to render the female body particularly unstable.

Most vitalists agreed that women were susceptible to nervous disorders.[565] Women's inherent sensibility, suggested Raulin, was one prime source for the health problems they experienced:

> La sensibilité attachée à l'essence des femmes, ou à des constitutions particulieres qui en sont plus susceptibles que d'autres, fait que leurs fibres portées quelquefois au dernier point de délicatesse, sont affectées par le moindre accident; c'est-là la source d'une infinité de symptômes vaporeux & souvent des vapeurs les plus violentes.[566]

---

[564] "Chez les hommes nous trouverons des contentions d'esprit de toute espece; des gens de Lettres, des solitaires studieux, méditatifs & mélancholiques, des jeunes gens livrés aux excès de la débauche, des pertes immodérées, des veilles continuelles, boissons excessives en vin & en liqueurs, l'abus du tabac, celui des aliments, sans oublier celui que l'on fait aujourd'hui dans tous les états du chocolat & du caffé; boissons pernicieuses..." (Pomme, *Affections vapoureuses*, 15-16).

[565] Joseph Raulin, for example, pointed out that women had been more susceptible to nervous disorders since the time of Hippocrates, but that these diseases had become ever more serious and complex, so that by the middle of the eighteenth century, "les maladies des femmes excedent de plus de deux cents celles qui sont particulieres aux hommes" (Raulin, *Affections vapoureuses*, viij).

[566] Raulin, *Affections vapoureuses*, xix.

What this suggests is that because sensibility inhered in their sex, women were required to take greater pains at moderating themselves than men. The existence of a specifically female sensibility opened them up to a greater susceptibility to vapours, precisely because of their inner delicacy and refinement.

Tissot, by contrast, linked female sensibility and illness with the practices of elite sociability, suggesting that nervous maladies, particularly those of elite women, emerged from psychic causes: they could be directly attributable to excessive imaginations over-stimulated by the almost infinite proliferation of novels:

> Dès la bavette jusques à la vieillesse la plus avancée, elles les lisent avec une si grande ardeur, qu'elles craignent de se distraire un moment, ne prennent aucun mouvement, & souvent veillent très tard pour satisfaire cette passion, ce que ruine celles qui sont elle-mêmes auteurs, & ce nombre s'accroît tous les jours.[567]

The consequences of such emotional imbalance were profound and devastating: "Une fille qui a dix ans lit au lieu de courir, doit être à vingt une femme à vapeurs & non point une bonne nourrice."[568] The sufferings of elite women, Tissot argued, were a natural outcome of their lives of gluttony, inactivity, and, more importantly, excessive passion. Their ills were culturally induced, the products of over-civilization.

Tissot's comments suggest that within a "sensible" framework, the female body assumed monstrous proportions. Not only could women, through the idea of corporeal sensitivity, infect and influence the bodies and minds of those around them, but they could also infect themselves and the bodies housed within them. Indeed, the medical establishment defined women as the epitome of dangerous

---

[567] Samuel-Auguste-André-David Tissot. *De la santé des gens de lettres* (Lausanne: François Grasset et Comp.; Lyon: Benoit Duplain, 1758), 183-84.

[568] Tissot, *Gens de lettres*, 183-4.

pathology, seeing in them corrupt entities that threatened and undermined social cohesion. While women possessed the "principle of all life," as François Azouvi has observed,[569] this principle was subject to the inherently threatening environment of the womb. "Cette matrice peut tout produire–le meilleur et le pire," notes Jean-Pierre Peter, "Les monstres y fructifient presqu'aussi couramment que d'innocentes vies y sont tragiquement broyées."[570] Doctors argued that women, morally corrupt through the actions of the first woman, Eve, functioned as the repository for human weakness, and as a result were condemned to the dangers of a reproductive life as punishment for their sin.[571] Thus defined by their reproductive pathology, women, in turn, pathologized society.

The medical model of sensibility thus conspired with cultural understandings about gender to posit the sensitive woman as a menacing being whose volatile and capricious passions–aided and abetted by the instability of her organs and the essential softness of her physical form–threatened or horrified the stability of the social system. It is exactly at this moment that what was initially perceived as good for society–beneficent moral sensibility–was transformed into pathology. Nowhere was this more incisively articulated than in Pierre Roussel's *Système moral et physique de la femme*. Roussel observed that while young boys and girls shared very similar physiological features, men and women were markedly different. Young men gained strength and solidity at puberty, while young women retained strong ties–both

---

[569] François Azouvi, "Woman as a Model of Pathology in the Eighteenth Century," *Diogènes* 115 (1981): 24.

[570] Peter, "Femmes et médecins," 343. Pierre Pomme reminded his readers that excessive sensibility threatened not only woman's health and well-being, but also, potentially, that of her children, by recalling "plusieurs exemples de filles tourmentées des vapeurs, qui leur venoient par succession de leurs parents" (Pomme, *Affections vapoureuses*, 17).

[571] Williams, *Cultural History*, 233.

physically and emotionally–to their child-like selves. Not only were they physically weaker, but their organic instability and weakness led to a state of emotional frailty. "Plus sensible[s] que robuste[s]," women were governed by their essential "mollesse," a diagnosis which rendered them overly sensitive to the impulses of the world around them.[572] Though education could change this, softness and sweetness were–and should continue to be–women's natural destiny.[573] The very differences that defined women as women were the qualities which ultimately made them attractive to the men they would marry.[574]

For Roussel, sexual difference was not a matter of medical theory; rather, it inhered in the state of nature itself. Roussel's woman was radically other–weak, vulnerable, unstable–precisely because nature made her this way. Furthermore, because nature made her this way, woman-as-other was fulfilling her natural and inescapable destiny. This approach was also evident in the work of other vitalists. Raulin, for example, while quick to position himself against the postulations of the ancients, who argued that the womb alone was the source of female hysteria, nonetheless devoted a large portion of his book to the intricate details of female reproductive organs, thus emphasizing her sexual difference as the cause of her emotional and nervous weakness.

Here, then, we come to a curious self-fulfilling prophecy: not only were women, by their natures sensitive, a fact which rendered their physical bodies weaker, but these bodies, by their very weakness, served to confirm women's innate sensibility.

---

[572] Roussel, *Système physique et moral*, 27.

[573] Roussel, *Système physique et moral*, 36.

[574] Jean-André Venel, *Essai sur la santé et sur l'éducation médicinale des filles destinées au mariage* (Yverdon: Chez la Société Littéraire & Typographique, 1776).

By locating sexual difference within the body, by asserting it through the lens of sensibility, and finally, by arguing from the perspective of natural law, sexual incommensurability emerged not only as fact, but also, as utterly irrevocable. Within this framework, women could not possibly escape their biological destiny.[575]

One could argue that such a positioning was not necessarily limiting. After all, according to philosophers such as Thomas, women held exalted social positions precisely because of their innate sensibility,[576] and, as we have seen in earlier chapters, many an etiquette treatise and moral essay waxed poetic on women's essential role in the civilizing process. As such, the sensitive female body could appear as a natural extension of such benevolent and almost universally lauded character traits. Unfortunately, no such benign relationship existed between psychic and corporeal sensibility. Instead, the gendered bodily encounter with sensibility was inevitably fraught. For if sensibility relied on the indeterminacy of the individual, and if, at the same time, the idea of woman relied on the over-determinacy of the individual, then the combination of woman and sensibility was profoundly threatening to the social order. Ironically, while the very fluid, undefined, flexible nature of the female body would appear to offer the greatest potential for the realization of the vitalist framework, the opposite appears to have been true: women's predisposition to sensibility, as determined by the weakness of their organs, rendered their sensibility contaminated, impure, and poisonous. As Azouvi explains:

---

[575] Steinbrügge, *Moral Sex.*

[576] In his *Essai sur le caractère, les moeurs et l'esprit des femmes dans les différens siècles* (Paris: chez Moutard, 1772), Thomas builds on the framework proposed by the Genevan Ami Lullin, presenting the women of virtue as those who, "joignent à une raison vraiment cultivée une ame forte, & relévent par des vertus, leurs sentiments de courage et d'honneur" (205).

> if life is defined by capacity for feeling...we must accept that, of all living beings, woman is the one who incarnates, to a notable degree, all the essential properties of life....In effect, to live is to feel; now, this is the definition of woman but it is also the origin of her illnesses and of the inevitable weakness which leads her to final exhaustion.[577]

Women's bodies transformed the beneficent qualities of sensibility into monstrous qualities, such that women themselves–defined and understood through their bodies–became the monsters.

Santé, *sensibilité*, and *devoir*: the illnesses of Madame Necker

Madame Necker was deeply aware of the medical currents of her time. Indeed, this naturalized relationship between women, sensibility, illness, and ultimately contagion or contamination, directly influenced Madame Necker's experience and understanding of illness. In her writings, she conceived of her illnesses at both psychic and somatic levels, as sufferings which played themselves out on an ever-present ailing body. For Madame Necker, illness was disabling, in that it prevented her from writing, caused her family stress and hardship, and further geographically isolated her–through her inability to travel–from her Swiss homeland. At the same time, however, her illnesses took on a profoundly performative nature, in that they enabled her to plumb more fully the depths of her sensibility, and further, to corporeally enact her filial neglect and Calvinist culpability. From this perspective, Madame Necker's body became the stage for the performance of Calvinist abjection, a way of claiming the suffering of society in order to recover her own moral failure. The section that follows explores her maladies in greater detail and demonstrates the ways in which each of these themes played itself out within her ailing body.

---

[577] Azouvi, "Woman as Pathology," 35.

While Madame Necker made regular mention of her illnesses throughout her correspondence, her understandings were most clearly and thoroughly developed in her extended correspondence with her two Swiss friends, Etienette Clavel de Brenles and Henriette Réverdil. The observations of her colleagues and family–in particular the letters written by her friends Antoine-Léonard Thomas and Georges Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, and her daughter Germaine–provide further context. The correspondence indicates that Suzanne Necker's illnesses can be broadly divided into two categories. While at times these two categories can be considered as wholly distinct from one another, at other times they overlap, so that the effects of one exacerbate or heighten the impact of the other.

The first category includes those illnesses which she described in great detail. These have relatively clear beginnings and endings and recognizable and definable symptoms including fevers, chills, coughs, tooth problems, and so forth. In a 1767 letter to Mme de Brenles, for example, she recounted a perilous journey that was fraught by ill health: "j'ai eu la fièvre en route, j'en avois le germe depuis deux jours."[578] Similarly, in 1790, she warned the pastor David Levade that she was not fit to welcome visitors, noting that "j'ai eu Monsieur cette nuit un accès de toux qui ma jettée dans un grand accablement, je suis hors d'état aujourdhui de recevoir aucune visite."[579] In each of these cases, Necker describes her symptoms and the duration of the illness is easily discernible: it had a beginning and a projected end. In addition to this, the ailments appear to have been limited to purely physical sufferings. Within

[578] Curchod Necker, Letter to Etienette Clavel de Brenles, 20 mai 1767, IS1915/xxx/h/1, BCUL; see also Golowkin, *Lettres diverses,* 304.

[579] Curchod Necker, Letter to David Levade, undated, ms.fr. 301, BGE.

this category of illness, Madame Necker does not refer to psychic or emotional distress, but relies purely on the expression of physical weakness.

The second category of illness is markedly different. In this case, the symptoms are not clearly defined, nor are they chronologically delineated. Rather Necker's sufferings remain vague and somewhat amorphous. Described variously by terms such as "foiblesse," "incommodité," "infirmité," or "langueur," among others,[580] these maladies appear at least superficially to resemble the nervous ailments so popular during this period. This resemblance is more profound if one considers that Suzanne's illnesses seem to be directly related to emotional turmoil or disturbance. For example, in 1765 she suggested that her health might not be good enough to travel. "Je porte encore l'empreinte de mes anciennes douleurs," she confided to Mme de Brenles, marking herself physically with the psychic experience of emotional loss.[581]

While the intensity of Madame Necker's psychosomatic suffering fluctuated, the experience of illness dominated her physical landscape. At some points, the situation was terrifyingly desperate and she felt very close to death;[582] at other times, she sensed improvement. In April 1768, she reported to Madame de Brenles that she was getting better, but still maintaining a special diet even as she had returned

---

[580] Curchod Necker, Letters to Etienette Clavel de Brenles, IS1915/xxx/h/1, BCUL. See also Golowkin, *Lettres diverses*, 265; 269; 286-87. The *Dictionnaire de l'Académie françoise* (1762) defines these terms as follows: "foiblesse" relates to fainting or swooning, and can also, on a political level, refer to a weak state (1:757); "incommodité" means indisposition or illness (1:918); "infirmité" refers to indisposition or chronic illness (1:929); and "langueur" is defined as psychosomatic distress or depression (2:13).

[581] Curchod Necker, Letter to Etienette Clavel de Brenles, Paris, 7 juin 1765, IS1915/xxx/h/1, BCUL; also in Golowkin, *Lettres diverses*, 284.

[582] Curchod Necker, Letter to an unidentified correspondent, A Versailles, le 25 février, IS1508, BCUL.

to her normal daily schedule;[583] just two months later, however, she apologized for not writing as she had been suffering from six weeks of fever and was only just beginning to pick up her pen with difficulty.[584] Even though her health was improving, it was still precarious, for she noted that she was still at her country home at St. Ouen and not yet up to the intensity of the Parisian social whirl. By September 1768, she was suffering yet again, but this time from "un nouvel accident [qui] avoit fait craindre que ma langueur ne devint très-dangereuse," a situation which caused her husband, Jacques Necker, and her close friend Thomas to urge her to journey to Mont d'Or to take the waters.[585] The trip was perilous, but the waters did appear to have some positive effect. By December 1768, she was coughing again, though she was quick to mention that she felt healthier than normal, particularly during a season that was the source of much illness for many people.[586]

This situation, in which Madame Necker described periods of grave illness followed by periods of recuperation, appears to typify her life experience and continues throughout her correspondence. To a certain extent, as mentioned earlier, these sufferings were reminiscent of the indefinable nervous disorders to which women of her class were regularly subject. But while it might be tempting to suggest that her careful codification of illness amounted to nothing more than narcissistic hypochondria, it is important to note that both family members and friends confirmed

---

[583] Curchod Necker, Letter to Etienette Clavel de Brenles, Paris, le 25 avril 1768, IS1915/xxx/h/1, BCUL; see also Golowkin, *Lettres diverses*, 347.

[584] Curchod Necker, Letter to Etienette Clavel de Brenles, Paris, le 28 juin 1768, IS1915/xxx/h/1, BCUL; See also Golowkin, *Lettres diverses*, 348.

[585] Curchod Necker, Letter to Etienette Clavel de Brenles, Paris, le 4 septembre 1768, IS1915/xxx/h/1, BCUL. See also Golowkin, *Lettres diverses,* 353.

[586] Curchod Necker, Letter to Etienette Clavel de Brenles, Paris, le 12 décembre 1768, IS1915/xxx/h/1, BCUL. See also Golowkin, *Lettres diverses*, 356.

her assessments. In 1786 Germaine de Staël reported that her mother, while suffering, endured a health-related trip to Plombières reasonably well.[587] The letters of Antoine-Léonard Thomas to Madame Necker are even more revealing. Between 1781 and 1785, he referred constantly to the state of Necker's health, suggesting her role as a martyr for the good of society: "Je crains, madame, que vous ne fassiez pas tout ce qu'il faut pour rétablir votre santé," he admonished her in 1781, adding, "Je crains, pour vous, cette activité de devoir, qui vous dévore, et qui vous fait sans cesse sacrifier vous-même à ceux que vous aimez."[588]

How might we understand the nature of Suzanne Necker's illnesses? How might we distinguish her suffering from that of contemporaneous society women who also sought out the medical opinions of specialists and whose indefinable and seemingly interminable maladies severely inhibited their public and private lives? The answer, I believe, lies in her profound faith, her deep guilt, and her intimate awareness of her own mortality.

Madame Necker's illnesses came and went, but she herself used a very different barometer to assess her psychic and somatic well being, citing the death of her mother as a turning point in her life. "Je suis trez persuadée que la mort de ma mére a altéré ma santé d'une manière irréparable," she wrote, "car dans ce moment ou tout tourne au gré de mes désirs je n'ai presque pas deux heures de bien être."[589] Madame Necker's doctor, Théodore Tronchin, confirmed this diagnosis, observing that the profound distress that she experienced as a result of her mother's death

---

[587] Staël, *Correspondance générale*, 1:134

[588] Thomas, Letter to Suzanne Curchod Necker, "A Auteuil, ce 12 août 1781," in *Oeuvres complètes*, 6:260.

[589] Curchod Necker, Letter to Henriette Réverdil, 25 juin 1768, ms.suppl. 717, BGE.

occasioned severe bouts of weeping and many sleepless nights which fundamentally undermined her constitution and health.[590] From this point onward, she experienced relentless psychic and physical suffering in the form of ailments and maladies which bore little resemblance to the seasonal colds and influenzas which otherwise marked her life. For Madame Necker, the primary cause was obvious: her illnesses emanated directly from her experience of loss.[591]

As noted previously, loss was a central theme in Suzanne Necker's life and figured prominently in her correspondence. She used the space of the letter to relive the losses of her past, most notably the deaths of her parents (particularly her mother), but also to acknowledge the other losses that marked her adult existence. Her experience of parental loss, which she wrote and rewrote through her extensive correspondence with her Swiss friends, informed and influenced all of the experiences that followed. Significantly, for Suzanne Necker, loss was not just an emotional state, but also a physical reality. In Paris, for example, she experienced not only cultural and emotional dislocation, but also geographical dislocation, since some of her closest friends lived at great distances from the French capital. From this perspective, Madame Necker's illnesses can be seen as the physical embodiment of cartographic distance, an attempt not only to corporeally evoke the physical reality in which she found herself, but also to bridge the space between the home of her birth and her life in Paris. Today, we would perhaps classify such suffering under the rubric

---

[590] Haussonville, *Salon*, 2:287. Tronchin's diagnosis must have come later: in 1766, she expressed frustration that doctors appeared unable to attribute her illness to any specific causes (Suzanne Curchod Necker, Letter to Etienette Clavel de Brenles, Paris, 7 juin 1765, IS1915/xxx/h/1, BCUL; see also Golowkin, *Lettres diverses*, 284).

[591] Madame Necker attributes her illnesses to the death of her mother and to her need for "l'air natal" (Suzanne Curchod Necker, Letter to Etienette Clavel de Brenles, Paris, juin 1765, IS1915/xxx/h/1, BCUL; see also Golowkin, *Lettres diverses*, 282).

of homesickness. Eighteenth-century nostalgia–or *hemvé*,[592] as it was called in France–differs significantly from its contemporary counterpart. Understood as a medical disorder, it was a respiratory malady that manifested itself in a violent desire to return to one's home country: "Le *hemvé*...ne devient une peine d'esprit, que parce qu'il est réellement une peine de corps. L'eau, l'air différent de celui auquel on est habitué, produisent des changemens dans une frêle machine."[593]

Madame Necker's homesickness, which manifested itself in various maladies, became an indispensable autobiographical tool, a way of bringing people closer to her through sensibility and a way for her to attain a heightened sensibility. In this sense, her performance of illness can be seen as supremely narcissistic. Through her words and actions, she ensured her active presence in the minds of others, in the process becoming the direct focus of their sociable duty. This approach can be seen in a 1767 letter to Madame de Brenles, in which Madame Necker lamented the fact that she had not heard from her friend in a long while. In order to elicit a quicker response, she wrote:

> J'ai eu des moments où j'aurois désiré qu'il m'arrivât quelqu'accident effrayant pour jouir davantage de l'intérêt que vous prenez à ma vie; mais je réprimois ce souhait bizarre dans la crainte de la perdre au moment où vous la rendiez si heureuse."[594]

At the same time, Suzanne Necker's actions were not entirely self-indulgent. Just as her illnesses provoked her friend's sensibility, and from there, her duty, so too

---

[592] Louis de Jaucourt, "Hemvé, sub. Masc. (*Médecine*)," in *Encyclopédie*, 8:129-30. Interestingly enough, Tissot includes a section on "Heimveh" in a draft outline for his *Maladies des nerfs*. See IS3784/I/61, BCUL.

[593] Jaucourt, "Hemvé," 8:129.

[594] Curchod Necker, Letter to Etienette Clavel de Brenles, 18 juillet 1767, IS1915/xxx/h/1, BCUL; see also Golowkin, *Lettres diverses*, 319-20.

did the illnesses of Madame de Brenles (and those of her family members) similarly torment Madame Necker's body in a sympathetic performance of illness and obligation. As a woman of sensibility, she was physically assailed by her friend's attacks of vapours,[595] suffered on her behalf during her son's illness,[596] and trembled "pour [cette] santé si précieuse à mon coeur, et dont la certitude fait la douceur de ma vie."[597]

Ironically, Madame Necker's physical weakness undermined her attempts to maintain connections in the face of profound and debilitating loss. Her corporeal instability rendered her own existence eternally precarious, a fact which made the physical separation between Suzanne and her friends even greater, and consequently widened the psychic distance between Paris and the country of her birth. Letters were often delayed because of her illness[598] and she regularly resorted to dictating her letters to a secretary or friend.[599] Her frequent maladies also inhibited and interrupted her ability to travel, particularly to Switzerland.[600] Thus disease, while it enabled the exchange of shared sensibility, actually further separated her from her

---

595 Curchod Necker, Letter to Etienette Clavel de Brenles, 18 juillet 1767, IS1915/xxx/h/1, BCUL; see also Golowkin, *Lettres diverses*, 319-320.

596 "J'ai souffert cruellement pour vous"(Curchod Necker, Letter to Jacques Abram Elie Daniel and Etienette Clavel de Brenles, Paris, 17 Décembre 1767, IS1915/xxx/h/1, BCUL; see also Golowkin, *Lettres diverses*, 339).

597 Curchod Necker, Letter to Etienette Clavel de Brenles, Paris, le 20 janvier 1768, IS1915/xxx/h/1, BCUL; see also Golowkin, *Lettres diverses*, 341.

598 In an undated letter to an unidentified correspondent, Necker apologized for her delayed response, writing: "je suis excusable; ma santé est entierement dérangée, et déjà je ne vois plus qu'a travers un nuage les objets qui m'ont si puissament affectée pendant que j'etois a Paris" (Curchod Necker, Letter to an unidentified correspondent, undated, D032/51, BGE).

599 Madame Necker relied on the services of two or three regular secretaries, among them one Mademoiselle Geoffroy, whose handwriting appears throughout her correspondence. See, for example, ms. 2628, BGE, which includes twelve notes from Suzanne Necker to her pharmacist, Henri-Albert Gosse, most of which are written by Mademoiselle Geoffroy on Madame Necker's behalf. She also, on occasion, asked close friends to write on her behalf.

600 Curchod Necker, Letter to Etiennette Clavel de Brenles, 7 juin 1765, IS1915/xxx/h/1, BCUL; see also Golowkin, *Lettres diverses*, 284.

native land and increased her experience of exile. As she wrote to Etienette Clavel de Brenles:

> Pardon Madame si je me sers dune main etrangere. Une incomodité moins d'angereuse que la precedente, mais plus importune ne me permést pas de tenir la plume; il me semble que c'est une nouvelle separation que je méts entre vous & moi, toutes les privations que jeprouve me font trop connoitre que léloignement comme la mort ajoute encore à l'amitié.[601]

Illness, in this sense, functioned as a physical barrier between Suzanne and that which her heart desired: her homeland, and the values of her people.[602]

But her illnesses also functioned as a barrier on another level altogether. While her extended suffering may have allowed her to lay claim to the sick aristocratic body and to subscribe to the cult of the celebrity doctor, a process which would appear to offer her the opportunity to transcend her otherwise culturally-stigmatized state, my research suggests an alternative reading. I argue that Madame Necker's illness actually served as a way of defiantly defining herself as morally 'other' to the social conventions and cultural mores of elite Parisian society. This process of self-stigmatization–or abjection–occurred on two distinct levels: not only did Necker claim her illness in order to take on the stigmata of the impoverished masses that surrounded her (a process which might be seen as the ultimate expansion of her charitable devoirs), but she also claimed the stigmata of Original Sin, professed and decreed by the moral philosophers of her homeland.[603] In this sense, she engaged in a performance of corporeal weakness in order to embody the

---

[601] Curchod Necker, Letter to Etienette Clavel de Brenles, Paris, 10 dec. 1765, IS1915/xxx/h/1, BCUL; see also Golowkin, *Lettres diverses*, 269.

[602] Loss, in this sense, could be understood as externally imposed exile–enforced absence from that which she held dear.

[603] See Chapter 2.

social and moral ills of elite French society. Through this act of double abjection, Suzanne was able to claim and perform both physical and moral stigmata with and on her own body, and from there, to use these performances to stimulate and further develop her already pronounced sensibility.

Madame Necker's abjection, staged in the space of the salon, ultimately functioned both as an act of penance for her filial neglect and, on a broader level, as a powerful public profession of her Calvinist faith in a country otherwise hostile to its tenets. Her thoughts are particularly revealing:

> Combien la religion change le tableau de la vie! les douleurs mêmes du corps sont le présage d'une nouvelle existence: nos défauts et ceux des autres nous offrent un double moyen d'exercer nos vertus; ainsi le paradis est déjà dans notre pensée, malheureux qui se tourmente pour en deviner les plaisirs, et à qui sa piété ne les a pas fais goûter d'avance.[604]

How might such a performance have operated? If Suzanne Necker's actions seemed, at least superficially, to conform to those of her contemporaries–if, in other words, she appeared to fully acquiesce to the state of suffering and malady which defined the female body during this period–a reading of cultural and religious alterity becomes difficult, if not impossible, to sustain. Indeed, it could very easily be argued that her stagings of illness were, as Maria Fairweather has suggested, merely "tiresome": thoroughly narcissistic gestures designed solely to claim the attention of family and friends.[605]

But what happens if we change the nature of the performer/spectator relationship? As mentioned previously, eighteenth-century understandings of illness

---

[604] Curchod Necker, *Mélanges*, 1:93.
[605] Fairweather, *Madame de Staël*, 47.

relied on the staging of illness through the body and its subsequent performance in the presence of a spectator. This framework allows for the agency of both body and patient as they engage the gaze of the audience. Throughout this chapter, the audience has been understood as the eighteenth-century public; in other words, the friends, family, and guests who were witness to Suzanne Necker's continued and often debilitating struggles with weakness and malady.

Within a Calvinist framework that relationship can be differently conceived; no longer a relationship between private individual and larger public, it is repositioned on an intimate level in the form of a spiritual dialogue between the believer and her creator. Such a performance might be considered from a penitential perspective, as the believer engages in activities and behaviours designed to demonstrate her commitment and fidelity to the tenets of her faith. For while the body may be only the "habitation passagère" of the soul,[606] it is nevertheless intrinsic to one's humanity and evocative of humanity's relationship with the Supreme Being. As Jean Calvin himself observed, in a 1563 letter to one of his French followers, Madame de Coligny:

> It is certain that all diseases ought not only to humble us in setting before our eyes our frailty, but also cause us to look into ourselves, that having recognized our own poverty we may place all our trust in [God's] mercy....since they are to us the messengers of death, we ought to learn to have one foot raised to take our departure when it shall please God.[607]

From this perspective, Madame Necker's illnesses formed part of an intricate, intimate theological practice founded not only upon the principle of total depravity

---

[606] Curchod Necker, *Mélanges*, 1:141.

[607] Calvin, Letter to Madame de Coligny (Geneva, 5th August 1563), in John Calvin, *Letters*, 4:331.

preached at the Synod of Dort, but also on the civic duty model introduced by eighteenth-century theologians such as Ami Lullin.[608] On the one hand, her philanthropic activities and corporeal suffering functioned as proof of her spiritual fidelity and paved her path to heaven. On the other, they served as a continual reminder of the essential uncertainty, frailty, and failure of the human existence, thus alluding to the transformative promise of divine grace, the possibility of everlasting life, and the seemingly arbitrary nature of divine will. "Tout est passager sur la terre," she noted, "à peine, dans notre foiblesse, pouvons-nous discerner les tems; et si l'on a dit qu'ils sont tous présens à l'Être suprême dans son immensité, on peut le dire aussi de nous dans notre petitesse."[609] Indeed, while her beneficent acts and religious fervour would no doubt strengthen her relationship with God, redemption was not assured. Divine grace was a gift bestowed by the Supreme Being alone.

Madame Necker's body, the stage upon which she performed her spiritual fidelity, incarnated not only her own culpability, but also that of eighteenth-century French aristocratic culture and society as a whole. In transforming the secular stage of elite sociability into a religious one, she enabled her own communion with God, in such a way that her body functioned as the link between her spiritual aspirations and innate human suffering and weakness. Significantly, this human suffering was both physical–as manifest in the patients of her hospice and in the dying bodies evoked in her 1790 treatise–and psychic–as understood through the myriad sufferings of the French elite.

---

[608] See Chapter 3.

[609] Curchod Necker, *Mélanges*, 1:71.

Antoine-Léonard Thomas reflected on the toll that philanthropy had taken on his friend's life. Her tireless labour on behalf of the poor and indigent depleted her own already weak resources; Madame Necker had sacrificed her health to the good of the nation. "Quoiqu'il en soit, et quelque parti que vous preniez," he wrote:

> j'apprendrai avec transport que vous quittez Paris, si vous pouvez le quitter, si les circonstances nouvelles ne vous y enchaînent pas de nouveau, si votre vie n'est pas destinée à être un sacrifice perpetuel de vous-même au bien que vous voulez faire, et au bonheur des autres.[610]

Read in this light, Madame Necker's suffering can be seen as part and parcel of a selfless gesture of virtue and generosity.

Her appropriation of her adopted culture's psychic disarray is more difficult to discern, but no less relevant to her understanding of her role as a Calvinist believer within the French state. As explored in the first chapter, Suzanne Necker felt both seduced and repelled by French aristocratic behaviours throughout her adult life. Elite social practices were foreign and mysterious and the superficiality that passed for intimate conversation exhausted her.[611] On a personal level, she yearned for her homeland, her religion, and her society.

On a broader level, French society, too, was becoming aware of the inherent dangers of city life, social artifice, and over-civilization. The works of Rousseau and Tissot contributed to the romanticizing of a simple, balanced peasant existence in the idyllic rusticity of the Swiss countryside, presenting the image of a 'noble,' rural labourer who enjoyed physical health and moral well being because he drew his inspiration from a beneficent natural environment. The person of society, meanwhile,

---

[610] Thomas, *Oeuvres complètes*, 6:269.

[611] See Chapter 1.

suffered deeply, his physical health undermined by moral weakness. Tissot warned that ambition, avarice, gluttony, luxury, and immoderation kept the elite body in a state of perpetual agitation and fundamentally undermined the individual's state of health.[612] Tissot's portrait could easily have been based on Madame Necker, whose experiences exactly mirrored those he presented. Indeed, agitation, torment, and languishing marked her Parisian existence.

In one key respect, however, she did not conform to Tissot's model. Unlike her Parisian colleagues, Madame Necker feared the social whirl and the intricacies of elite social practice. Duty, however–to her husband, to her social commitments, to her philanthropy–kept calling her back to the French capital.[613] From this perspective, her illnesses can be seen as corporeal manifestations of French elite society's moral weaknesses. Imprinted on Madame Necker's already suffering body, they extended and expanded the nature of her physical suffering, providing ample proof of humanity's need for divine grace and salvation.

From this perspective, physical suffering can be seen as evidence of moral fortitude; in particular, of Madame Necker's commitment to maintaining her spiritual fidelity in the face of profound difficulty and distress. As the Comte de Buffon observed:

---

[612] Tissot, *Gens du monde*, 48.

[613] Thomas expresses his concern for his friend's well-being as follows: "J'ai pensé à la faiblesse de votre santé, à ce Paris qui vous rappelle, et où vous aller mener une vie si différente de celle qui vous convient. Ah! le séjour de la campagne était si nécessaire à votre repos! Vous allez chercher des agitations nouvelles....vous avez eu [la gloire] de...mettre [la vertu] en action dans un pays et dans un siècle où presque tout le monde la met en paroles" (Thomas, Letter to Suzanne Curchod Necker, Arnay-le-Duc, ce 9 novembre 1781, in *Oeuvres complètes*, 6:264-65).

> Je vous vois au milieu du tourbillon d'un monde inquiet, environnée de mouvements orageux, pressée d'importunités ennuyeuses, conserver votre caractère inaltérable de bonté, de dignité, et ne pas perdre ce sublime repos, cette tranquillité si rare qui ne peut appartenir qu'à des âmes fermes et pures que la bonne conscience et la noble intention rendent invulnérables.[614]

Buffon imagined his friend as a moral beacon of conscience and goodwill, a unique figure of goodness and charity in an otherwise troubled aristocratic society. Paris and Parisian mores were dangerous to Madame Necker; not only did they add to her psychic distress, but they also exacerbated her corporeal suffering. In the city, she quite literally became the sick elite body imagined and evoked by Tissot and Rousseau.[615]

At the same time, her interminable illnesses enabled her to envisage a closer relationship with God. It was through her corporeal suffering that Madame Necker was able to approach the creator. "Jamais je n'ai eu plus besoin de courage pour supporter le poids de mon existence," she confessed to her old friend, the Genevan pastor Paul Moultou, "il me semble que mes longues angoisses m'ont déjà fait connoître l'éternité."[616] Thomas concurred. Noting that Madame Necker had: "le sentiment et le besoin de l'infini, qui vous appelle,"[617] he chided her gently, writing:

---

[614] Buffon, *Correspondance inédite*, 1:375.

[615] Thomas refers to what he perceives as a direct link between Paris and Suzanne Necker's illnesses in numerous letters, contrasting "le mouvement de Paris" with "le repos" which Madame Necker needs. See, for example: Thomas, Letter to Suzanne Curchod Necker, A Oullins près de Lyon, ce 15 juillet 1785, in *Oeuvres complètes*, 6:503.

[616] Curchod Necker, *Mélanges*, 1:148.

[617] Thomas, Letter to Suzanne Curchod Necker, "A Hières, ce 9 décembre 1781," in *Oeuvres complètes*, 6:270.

"vous anticipez un peu trop sur la vie immortelle, et vous oubliez que vous êtes sur la terre, comme vous le faites oublier aux autres, par vos sentiments et vos idées.[618]

Corporeal suffering, the conduit that enabled shared experience between Suzanne Necker and her distant friends, also, in this case, enabled spiritual communion. By claiming the sufferings of others, Madame Necker could absolve herself of her own moral transgressions. During her final years she imputed her illnesses to her daughter's moral failings.[619] Such an understanding suggests a desire to bridge the maternal chasm by imprinting her daughter's moral infirmity on her own frail body. This process of self-mortification, in which the sins of the daughter were superimposed over the sins of the mother and the memory of her deceased parents, enabled Madame Necker to approach God, death, and redemption. Her nostalgic desire to recover her past takes on new significance when read in this light. "J'ai toujours aimé les pensées tristes," she wrote in 1776, "ce goût avoit quelque chose de plus piquant lorsque j'étois plus jeune; je me promenais souvent alors dans les asiles de la mort; je sentois, sans me l'avouer, qu'ils alloient renfermer bientôt ce que j'avois de plus cher, et qu'il s'écouleroit un long intervalle avant que je pusse rejoindre ces précieuses cendres."[620]

Near the end of her life, Madame Necker experienced almost no periods of well being. Her daughter commented that she was always ill,[621] an observation confirmed by one of the Neckers' guests, Maria Josepha Holroyd, who noted in 1791

---

[618] Thomas, Letter to Suzanne Curchod Necker, "A Paris, ce 7 juin 1784," in *Oeuvres complètes*, 6:405.

[619] Staël, *Correspondance générale*, 2:253. I return to this statement in the next chapter.

[620] Curchod Necker, *Mélanges*, 3:173.

[621] Staël, *Correspondance générale*, 1:414

that while Madame Necker was "rather a fine woman," she was "much painted, and, when she is not painted, very yellow."[622] By 1794, the situation was grave. In early February, Germaine reported to her lover, Narbonne, that her mother was dangerously ill.[623] Just a few days later, Suzanne's physician, the celebrated Tissot, corroborated this diagnosis.[624] Suzanne Necker finally died, in the arms of her husband, on May 14, 1794.[625] She was fifty-seven years old.

---

[622] Maria Josepha Holroyd Stanley, Baroness of Alderley, *The Girlhood of Maria Josepha Holroyd, Lady Stanley of Alderley: Recorded in Letters of a Hundred Years Ago, from 1776 to 1796* (London, England: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1896), 64. Maria Josepha Holroyd, daughter of the First Earl of Sheffield, passed through Geneva and Lausanne in 1791 and recorded her observations in a series of letters.

[623] Staël, *Correspondance générale*, 3:222.

[624] Staël, *Correspondance générale*, 3:224.

[625] In Staël's final letter to Narbonne, dated 15 May 1794, she wrote: "Quoique je sois résolue à cesser toute correspondence entre nous, je vous dois de vous apprendre le cruel événement qui a frappé ma destinée hier: ma mère est expiree dans les bras de mon pere. Je vous épargne les details–cruels, pour moi, et dans un autre temps pour vous–qui ont suivi cet affreux évenement. Nous ne nous entendons plus, et j'ai été si malade et si bouleversée qu'a peine si je puis ecrire" (Staël, *Correspondance générale,* 2:285).

Chapter 5:
Specular Death: Staging the Virtuous Body

Les moucherons s'assemblèrent un jour sur un champignon; l'un d'eux, appesanti par l'âge, parla ainsi aux plus jeunes: Ecoutez-moi; j'ai une longue expérience; j'ai vu le lever de l'aurore et je vois la fin du monde. C'étoit la nuit qui s'approchoit.[626]

La mort est certaine, & elle ne l'est pas.[627]

Je ne m'étonne plus du courage des martirs, il me paroit bien clair à présent que le calme de la conscience fait la seule force de l'homme.[628]

The revolutionary journal *Le Sans Culotte* reported the details surrounding Suzanne Necker's death and burial on 2 August 1794: "Madame Necker, morte depuis peu, a demandé qu'on la mît dans un cercueil de plomb avec un couvercle de verre et dans l'esprit de vin."[629] Necker's grieving husband, the article further noted, had followed her requests almost to the letter, with a single exception: he chose not

---

[626] Curchod Necker, *Mélanges*, 2:12.

[627] Jacques-Bénigne Winslow, *Dissertation sur l'incertitude des signes de la mort*, trans. Jacques-Jean Bruhier (Paris: Morel, 1742), 41.

[628] Curchod Necker, Letter to Jacques Abram Elie Daniel Clavel de Brenles, Paris, le 12 Décembre 1769, IS1915/xxx/h/1, BCUL; see also Golowkin, *Lettres diverses*, 374.

[629] *Le Sans Culotte*, 15 Thermidor, l'an II de la Liberté et de l'Egalité (2 Aout ère arabienne). Madame Necker is buried in a stone tomb in a family plot on the grounds of the Château de Coppet, in Coppet, Switzerland.

to cover her casket with glass. Necker's reasoning was simple. Illness had disfigured his wife's features, leaving only a memory of her youthful beauty.

Suzanne Necker had prepared meticulously for her death. Deeply concerned with maintaining the sanctity of her body, she consulted with numerous doctors in order to gain a thorough understanding of the best and most efficient approaches to embalming.[630] She crafted elaborate plans for her tomb and spelled out her final wishes in minute detail. Her precise directives, developed over a period of ten years, stipulated that her body would be embalmed, positioned in a casket as described in the newspaper account, and placed in a tomb for which her husband alone had the key:

> Tu feras faire dans le mur une porte de fer dont toi seul auras la clef, porte qui servira à passer ton corps quand tu ne seras plus et à le porter sur le même lit pour mêler tes cendres avec les miennes, et en observant les mêmes précautions, avec cette différence seulement que tu ordonneras qu'on ferme la porte du fer un mois après ta mort afin que nous restions seuls ensemble....souviens-toi que nous devons être unis sur la terre et dans le ciel, et exécute mes dernières volontés. Ce coeur, qui fut à toi et qui bat encore pour toi, mérite que tu respectes ses deux faiblesses: la crainte d'être ensevelie sans être morte et celle d'être séparée de toi.[631]

Madame Necker decreed that Jacques Necker was to visit this tomb weekly, and that he was to retrieve, one by one, a series of letters which Suzanne had specifically

---

[630] See Paul-Gabriel d'Haussonville, *Madame de Staël et M. Necker d'après leur correspondence inédite* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1925), 61; and Staël, *Correspondance générale*, 3:1-2.

[631] Quoted in Haussonville, *Salon de Madame Necker*, 2:293-94.

designated to be opened after her death.[632] Finally, she insisted that Jacques Necker would follow the same embalming procedures upon his death, so that the two could be reunited.

When death finally came, during the night of 14 May 1794, Madame Necker was ready: every detail was accounted for. Her body was prepared according to her careful instructions and laid out in a lead casket.[633] Three months later, upon the completion of her tomb, Suzanne Necker's body was laid to rest in a vat of alcohol.[634] In control of her corporeal autobiography to the very end, Necker wanted to put her infirmity on permanent display, embalmed and preserved for eternity.

Even in an era concerned about the finality of death and preoccupied with fears of premature burial, the reasons behind Suzanne Necker's detailed plans lay well beyond the range of society's comprehension. Indeed, to her contemporaries,

---

[632] See Jacques Marquet de Montbreton de Norvins, *Mémorial de J. de Norvins: Souvenirs d'un historien de Napoléon*, 3 vols. (Paris: Plon, 1896), 88-89. Norvins writes that he is drawing on the testimony of his uncle, as well as of "Constant et de Châteauvieux" (88). Norvins suggests that these letters were placed in the tomb by an old and trusted servant, who, entrusted with an extra copy of the key and a body of letters, fulfilled Suzanne Necker's desire for posthumous communion with her husband (*Mémorial*, 89). Haussonville, however, vehemently denounces this version of events, arguing not only that the monument was constructed after Suzanne Necker's death (thus making it impossible for her to give an extra key to a caretaker), but also, that if it had any basis in fact, "la tradition s'en serait assurément conservée dans la famille; or je n'ai rien entendu dire de semblable" (*Staël et Necker*, 65). Béatrice Jasinski notes that construction of the tomb began sometime during the final months of 1793 (Staël, *Correspondance*, 2:524n4), which suggests that Norvins' interpretation is plausible. Norvin's version of events is given more credence through Auguste de Staël's assertion that Suzanne Necker wrote her husband numerous consolatory letters expressly designed to be read after her death, two of which he includes in his work (See Auguste de Staël, *Notice sur M. Necker* [Paris: Treuttel et Würtz, 1820], 327-330).

[633] According to Haussonville, Madame Necker even outlined the exact angle and position of her body in order to ensure that her head would always be visible above the edge of the basin (*Staël et Necker*, 62).

[634] Haussonville, no doubt drawing on Germaine de Staël's commentary in a letter to Meister dated 16 May 1794 (*Correspondance générale*, 3:2), suggests that this event took place in August 1794 (*Staël et Necker*, 64). Antoine de Baecque, however, asserts that the funeral took place on 8 September 1794, but provides no references to back this statement up (*Glory and Terror*, 195).

Necker's death and burial were objects of morbid fascination.[635] Discerning or assigning meaning to her instructions at two centuries' remove is even more difficult. How might we understand these rituals? What purpose did they serve? Finally, how can these practices elucidate our understanding, not only of Suzanne Necker, but also of her culture?

In this final chapter, I propose to explore the relationships between dying, death, burial, and spectacle. More specifically, I will argue that Madame Necker's complex and detailed burial rituals function as part of an elaborate process of memorialization in which she linked her frail corporeality, lived out through three decades of physical suffering, to the moral disease of elite French society. Hers was a specular death, a process whereby the tormented corporeal relic served as an opening though which humanity could gaze on its moral weakness and reflect on its inherent decrepitude. Necker's body, physically marked by illness, itself became the mark–or stigma–of social malaise, through an almost messianic process which could absolve her of her sin and enable her, finally, to claim divine grace. On an intimate and personal level, Suzanne Necker's final gesture served as a recuperative act of fidelity and pious devotion, not only to the memory of her mother, but also to God.

Dying was a state that Suzanne Necker understood intimately. As she observed in a letter to her close friend Paul Moultou, "Jamais je n'ai eu plus besoin de courage pour supporter le poids de mon existence: il me semble que mes longues

---

[635] According to Philippe Ariès, the spy assigned to the Necker family "reported that Mme Necker had 'ordered her body to be preserved in alcohol, like an embryo'" (*Hour of our Death*, 386). An anonymous quatrain, apparently popular in the immediate aftermath of Suzanne Necker's death, and published in the 15 March 1927, edition of the *Mercure de France*, caricatured her plan: "Ci-gît qui dans son agonie/ N'imagina rien de plus beau/ Que d'être placée au tombeau/ Comme une pêche en l'eau-de-vie" (*Mercure de France*, "Le corps de Mme de Staël est-il conservé dans l'alcool?," *Mercure de France*, March 15, 1927).

angoisses m'ont déjà fait connoître l'éternité."[636] As a result of her frequent illnesses, she conceived herself as a frail body prone to weakness and always on the verge of death. Hers was a dying body, whose journey into decrepitude and decay was clearly discernible. At the same time, through her charity work, hers was a public body, physically marked by the sufferings of those whose causes she championed, and prominently displayed for all to behold.

Death was a popular, and controversial, topic of discussion during the eighteenth century. In the medical profession, death was seen as the antithesis of life.[637] In the words of one doctor, Paul-Jacques Malouin (1701-1778), if life could be defined through movement–respiration and the circulation of blood–then death could be understood as the point of absolute stillness: "l'immobilité parfaite."[638] However, even as the medical profession propagated this oppositional perspective, another, more fluid understanding of death gained equal currency. Louis de Jaucourt posited death as an imperceptible process which began at the moment of birth, thus envisioning life as an inevitable and drawn-out process of dying:

> Peu-à-peu cette vie s'augmente & s'étend; elle acquiert de la consistance, à mesure que le corps croît, se développe & se fortifie; dès qu'il commence à dépérir, la quantité de vie diminue; enfin lorsqu'il se courbe, se désseche & s'affaisse, la vie décroît, se resserre, se réduit presque à rien. Nous commençons de vivre par degrés, & nous finissons de mourir, comme nous commençons de vivre.[639]

---

[636] Curchod Necker, *Mélanges*, 1:148.

[637] Paul-Jacques Malouin, "Mort (médecine)," in *Encyclopédie*, 10:718-727.

[638] Malouin, "Mort," 10:718.

[639] Jaucourt, "Mort," 10:716.

Jaucourt's definition was heavily informed by the perspectives of Madame Necker's close friend, the Comte de Buffon,[640] who offered a similarly biologically determinist view of the human life: death, he maintained, was a lengthy and almost imperceptible process that began at the point at which the body reached maturity. Taking each aspect of the body in turn, Buffon painted a picture of inevitable decrepitude, in which the glory and beauty of youth slowly gave way to physical degeneration and decay.[641] "Le corps meurt donc peu à peu et par parties," Buffon observed, in such a way that, ultimately, death could only be understood as the final nuance of life.[642] For Buffon and Jaucourt, death and life were inextricably intertwined; each was a natural part of the other and neither could exist on its own.

The very fact that the contradictory perspectives of Malouin and Jaucourt could co-exist within the pages of the *Encyclopédie* suggests that meanings and understandings of death were in flux during this period. Historians who have studied French attitudes toward death see the eighteenth century as a period of uncertainty, an era during which attitudes towards death and dying were undergoing tremendous change. Philippe Ariès notes a desire to conceal death during this period, an instinct which, he suggests, manifested itself in an indifference to the rituals of death.[643] In contrast to previous centuries during which the ceremonial nature of funeral rituals was upheld, Ariès contends that eighteenth-century mourners practiced "restraint in the outward signs of mourning": not only was there an increased desire to hide the body, but there were no ceremonies, no vigils, no tolling bells, no hired mourners,

---

[640] Georges Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, *Histoire naturelle générale et particulière*, 21 vols. (Paris: Imprimerie du Roy, 1749-1789), 2:557-603.

[641] Buffon, *Histoire naturelle*, 2:558; 2:567.

[642] Buffon, *Histoire naturelle*, 2:567; 2:578.

[643] Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, trans. Helen Weaver (New York, USA: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981).

and few candles.[644] In addition to these proofs of indifference, Ariès notes that wills began to include fewer and fewer instructions for funerals and suggests that these changes came from a desire to deny the meaning and relevance of death as a part of everyday life and, in the process, to create the impression of immortality.[645]

A contradictory impulse emerged at the same time: just as death appeared to be losing its meaning as a public event, the physical cadaver began to assume immense importance in the public sphere. As an entity still believed to be possessed of inherent sensibility, it appeared to defy the prognostications of the medical profession.[646] As Suzanne Necker recalled: "On parloit, dans la *petite Feuille*, du tombeau du maréchal de Saxe, et l'on disoit avec ce ton précieux à la mode: *La figure de la mort a tant d'expression, qu'on pourroit dire qu'elle est pleine de vie.*"[647]

This interest in–and fear of–the sensibility of the corpse led to public outrage at instances perceived as corporeal violation, such as the ransacking of graves for medical dissections, the use of cemeteries as grazing spaces, and the unhygienic

---

[644] Ariès, *Hour*, 325.

[645] Ariès, *Hour*, 326. Calvin promoted an austere approach to death and burial. Arguing against extravagant or elaborate rituals of mourning, he chose a simple burial in an unmarked grave (Watt, *Choosing Death*, 90). However, Consistory decisions regarding suicide, which included desecration of the corpse, imposition of fines and the denial of burial rites, suggest that in 'normal' situations, the reformed citizenry was not so willing to accept this spartan model and that more extravagant rituals involving prayers, singing, and processions, remained the order of the day (Watt, *Choosing Death*, 86-90).

[646] For more insight into the symbolic power and potential of the corpse, see Antoine de Baecque, *Glory and Terror*, and Antoine de Baecque, *The body politic: Corporeal Metaphor in Revolutionary France, 1770-1800*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford, USA: Stanford University Press, 1997).

[647] Curchod Necker, *Mélanges*, 1:208.

nature of common graves.[648] It also led to a lengthy and contentious debate on the subject of premature burial, an extended discussion in which eighteenth-century society was forced to confront its fear of death through a process of public consideration and reflection.[649]

Suzanne Necker entered this debate in 1790, with a short treatise on the subject, *Des inhumations précipitées*, only twenty-two pages long, and organized into two sections. In the first, Necker outlined the reasons behind her strong critique of premature burial, while in the second, she proposed a new law which would help to ensure corporeal dignity and the peaceful passage from life to death. Necker's work capped half a century of discussion on this topic, a debate which had begun with the 1742 publication of Jacques-Jean Bruhier's translation of Jacques-Bénigne Winslow's treatise, the *Dissertation sur l'incertitude des signes de la mort et l'abus des enterremens & embaumemens précipités* and continued with François Thiéry's *La Vie de l'homme respectée et défendue dans ses derniers momens, ou Instruction sur les soins qu'on doit aux morts et à ceux qui paraissent l'être, sur les funérailles et les sépultures* (1787).[650]

---

[648] See Ariès, *Hour*, 368, and Philippe Ariès, *Western Attitudes Towards Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present*, trans. Patricia M. Ranum (Baltimore, USA and London, UK: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 69-70. Also, see Sylvie Camet, who notes that Sebastien Mercier and Nicolas-Edme Restif de La Bretonne, in their respective *Tableau de Paris* and *Nuits de Paris*, both expressed criticism of the apparent disregard for death and the dead body within the public sphere (Sylvie Camet, "La mort, spectacle parisien à la fin du XVIIIe siècle," in *Le Récit de la mort: Ecriture et histoire*, ed. Gérard Jacquin [Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2003], 109-23).

[649] See Pierre Chaunu, *La mort à Paris XVIe, XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* (Paris: Fayard, 1978), who argues that while the fear of premature burial was relatively minor at the beginning of the eighteenth century, it became a dominant feature of wills by mid-century and entered "une phase paroxysmique" by the end of the century, a fact which he attributes to the increased indifference towards death (437-38).

[650] François Thiéry, *La Vie de l'homme respectée et défendue dans ses derniers momens, ou Instruction sur les soins qu'on doit aux morts et à ceux qui paraissent l'être, sur les funérailles et les sépultures* (Paris: Debure l'aîné, 1787).

Winslow, a doctor in the Faculty of Medicine in Paris and member of the French Royal Academy of Sciences, began his *Dissertation* with a controversial statement: "La mort est certaine, & elle ne l'est pas. Elle est certaine, puisqu'elle est inévitable, elle ne l'est pas, puisqu'il est quelquefois incertain qu'on soit mort."[651] He then offered the reader numerous examples of premature burial, among them a monk who was removed, breathing, from a grave three or four days after his interment (but who had bitten his hands off in the meantime), a woman whose body began to tremble upon the first incision of a cesarean section, and a man, fully prepared for burial, who returned to life and complete health upon having water sprinkled into his mouth.

Winslow's work painted a horrific tableau of a multitude of bodies rising from their shrouds, their coffins, and even their graves, a picture filled with the shrieks and cries of apparently dead individuals dissected prematurely. He used these scenes of horror to deliver a simple message: the conventional signs and proofs of death[652] were insufficient means to prove certain or absolute death; the only certain sign of death was the beginning of the putrefaction of the corpse, a fact which led him to suggest a number of reforms with regard to the dying body.[653] Like Winslow, Thiéry, a Parisian doctor, stressed the uncertainty of death. Death, he insisted, was a multi-stage process which progressed from the ambiguous "état de mort,"[654] or apparent

---

[651] Winslow, *Dissertation*, 41.

[652] These proofs included holding a mirror or burning candle near the mouth or nostrils, balancing a full glass of water on the chest of a supine body, and poking or piercing the body with a sharp instrument in order to create physical flesh wounds.

[653] Winslow, *Dissertation*, 85.

[654] Thiéry, *Vie de l'homme*, 42.

death, from which a return to life was not unusual, through to "la vie réduite au moindre degré,"[655] and finally, real death.

Necker's *Inhumations* directly followed the path laid out by her predecessors: it outlined the uncertainty and ambiguity of death and proposed a series of reforms. Like Winslow, she posited death as uncertain, and like Thiéry, she proposed a multi-stage palliative model in which the dying individual moved almost insensibly between the stages of *agonie* and *cadavre*: apparent and absolute death.[656] In addition to this, Necker argued for an extended waiting period between death and burial, during which the body should not be treated as dead, but rather as sick.[657] However Madame Necker's work also differed significantly from that of her predecessors in other ways. She was not a medical professional and, therefore, could offer no horrific examples and make no medical claims.[658] Instead, as a woman, she wrote from the position of a gendered body already medically marked by weakness. Consequently, she took a different point of departure: speaking from the perspective of a woman of sensibility, she offered a moral reflection on dying, death and premature burial. Drawing on the ideas put forward by her friend and colleague, Buffon, Madame Necker posited death as the natural culmination of a lengthy process of dying. She further argued that the period of transition itself–an intermediary phase of

---

[655] Thiéry, *Vie de l'homme*, 43.

[656] "La mort commencée se nomme *agonie*. La mort apparente est encore un état de vie caché & insensible, qui succède à l'agonie, & il n'est pas rare que l'on en revienne. La mort entièrement achevée, est l'état de cadavre; mais il est un intervalle entre la mort apparente & qu'on croit certaine, & l'état de cadavre. Ce qu'on nomme la mort dans les premières heures, est la vie réduite au moindre degré possible; c'est l'avant-dernier terme que doit parcourir la vie interieure; c'est enfin un état intermédiaire entre la mort commencée & la mort complette, & personne de sait quelle sera la durée de cet état incertain" (Curchod Necker, *Inhumations*, 9).

[657] Curchod Necker, *Inhumations*, 11.

[658] At just twenty-two pages, her essay is also considerably shorter: Thiéry's study had 264 pages and Winslow/Bruhier's 372.

indeterminate duration–was of profound importance and deserved humanity's care, concern, and consideration. The dying body offered the possibility for humankind to achieve its greatest potential as "le protecteur des mourans."[659] Just as society took care of its young and its old, so too was it responsible for the care for the dying, those who floated in the space between life and death and who were no longer capable of giving physical signs of their struggles.

In order to mitigate against what she perceived as society's lack of concern for corporeal remains, Madame Necker outlined a policy proposal in the second section of the work. In a series of thirteen articles, she laid out the basic tenets of corporeal respect as they might be conceived within a judicial framework, mandating the responsibilities and actions of observers–be they doctors, police commissioners or witnesses–and outlining detailed procedures to be followed. Death could be confirmed only after an extended waiting period[660] and even then needed to be certified through a bureaucratic process which required the submission of a signed report to the police commissioner. The body was to be maintained until such time as decomposition became dangerous for the living. Only the doctor could operate on, or otherwise open, the body.[661]

In short, Suzanne Necker proposed a method of social organization which not only helped to alleviate the perceived problem of premature burial, but, more

---

[659] Curchod Necker, *Inhumations*, 7.

[660] Madame Necker recommended a minimum interval of forty-eight hours, but acknowledged that this could be extended up to seventy-two hours and potentially further in the cases of nervous, chronic or convulsive illnesses, whose symptoms sometimes resembled the state of death (Curchod Necker, *Inhumations*, 12). In order to facilitate this, she recommended the construction of "loges d'attente": warmed, well-aired spaces, open to the public and administered by surgeons (*Inhumations*, 14).

[661] Curchod Necker, *Inhumations*, 21.

importantly, ensured the corporeal dignity and respect of the dying body. By focusing directly on the period of transition between apparent and actual death, she highlighted the indeterminacy of the final stages of life by emphasizing uncertainty, ambiguity, and opacity. In the process, neither death nor life could be clearly defined; instead, each flowed seamlessly into the other. Dying, as a transitionary phase, lacked–indeed, in some cases, resisted–clear definition.

Madame Necker's perspectives, as she herself suggested, were born from her experiences as the director of the *Hospice de Charité*. While her philanthropic project was a success, there were also failures.[662] Mortality rates remained high and Necker became increasingly distressed at the treatment of the dead body. "Malgré tous mes efforts, " she wrote in the introduction to her *Inhumations*, "[je] n'ai jamais pu obtenir des Religieuses les plus compatissantes pour les vivans, assez de soin & de respect pour les morts."[663] Necker's perspectives also arose from a far more personal impulse: her own extended struggle with illness and concomitant experience of corporeal instability.

The *Inhumations*, together with Madame Necker's intricate funerary preparations, combine into an elaborate commemorative act, a public project of mourning informed by the fluidity between her private and public selves. Certainly, Suzanne Necker's funerary rituals and requirements suggest a need to conceive death within the parameters of public display and to claim death as a site of public mourning and memorialization; in other words, to use the space of the abject as a way of gesturing towards a collective responsibility for dying, death, and memory. In

---

[662] Doublet, *Hospice 1788*, 27-41.
[663] Curchod Necker, *Inhumations*, i.

the *Inhumations*, for example, Madame Necker was extremely critical of society's careless attitude towards the dead, suggesting that this callous negligence could be seen as tantamount to murder.[664] The society that did not take proper care of its dying members could be construed as a society of assassins: "L'on ne peut trop le répéter, le premier des devoirs des hommes est de prolonger la vie des hommes. L'assassin ne fait souvent que hâter la mort de quelques heures."[665]

In Suzanne Necker's conceptualization, dying, death, mourning, and memory were part of a public process of corporeal veneration, in which the body not only symbolized humankind's physical instability and uncertainty, but also manifested its moral promise and potential through the enactment of memory. Central to such a formulation was the idea of display: just as the sick body displayed its illnesses, so too the dying body functioned as a stage. In this case, however, the performer was humankind, as represented by those present: Madame Necker argued that it was only through society's response to the dead and dying that true virtue could be judged.

The dying body, itself, assumed performative prominence. Such, indeed, was the case with Madame Necker's elaborate–and some would say, excessive and obsessive–burial rituals. Christina Marsden Gillis has observed that while death creates an absence, that very absence creates a need for presence.[666] This relationship must also be reciprocal: presence relies on absence. In Suzanne

---

[664] "La cessation du mouvement, l'impassibilité totale, ne sont qu'une mort extérieure, & l'on est coupable d'homicide, si l'on ensevelit le corps avant d'être assuré que la mort intérieure & complette soit absolument consommée. Nos terribles usages semblent cependant propres à causer ou accélérer la mort intérieure" (Curchod Necker, *Inhumations*, 8).

[665] Curchod Necker, *Inhumations*, 10.

[666] Christina Marsden Gillis, ""Seeing the Difference": An Interdisciplinary Approach to Death, Dying, Humanities, and Medicine," *Journal of Medical Humanities* 27 (2005): 105-115.

Necker's case, the public visibility of corporeal abjection, as figured through the rituals of her dead body, enabled a coming to terms with the precariousness of life. "Dying," as Marsden Gillis suggests, "bridges a no man's land where the unfathomed and the unknowable confront the scientific and the humanistic imagination. While death may be the vanishing point of medical knowledge and representation, it is also a point of mediation."[667]

Madame Necker's involvement with a key act of eighteenth-century memorialization serves to highlight this relationship. In 1770, she initiated a subscription project,[668] and together with some eighty other members of the French intelligentsia, commissioned the famed sculptor Jean-Baptiste Pigalle[669] to create a monument to Voltaire. The resulting work, *Voltaire nu*, completed in 1776, provoked a furor. While the work had been designed to commemorate Voltaire's heroic contribution to the Enlightenment, Pigalle chose to render the great thinker as the old, weak, and frail being that he had become: a gaunt, emaciated man whose skin hung loosely off his skeleton. As an act of memorialization, it was a curious gesture that depicted greatness in the guise of the everyday. Corporeal decrepitude–in a body that, like Necker's, was marked by illness–rendered Voltaire's literary and philosophical achievements all the more monumental, even as the decaying body

---

[667] Marsden Gillis, "Seeing the Difference," 113.

[668] For more on this project, see Grimm, *Correspondance littéraire*, 9:14-17.

[669] Jean-Baptiste Pigalle (1714-1785) was a noted Rococo sculptor, whose works included royal commissions.

undermined this reading by gesturing toward the fundamental commonality of human experience.[670]

Madame Necker thought deeply about the nature of death and the process of memorialization during this period. In two letters to Thomas, for example, she imagined her own tomb as a tender and comforting space. "J'aime à penser, dans mes rêves romanesques, qu'on m'élèvera un monument parmi les beaux arbres de Saint-Ouen," she wrote in 1776, "vous en ferez l'inscription; et dans vos promenades solitaires, vous le regarderez, vous prêterez un moment l'oreille au bruit des feuilles agitées par les vents, à ce bruit qui semble imiter le murmure des ombres, si bien peint par Virgile."[671] These words, nostalgic and melancholy, suggest a courting of death and a desire for full communion with the afterlife.

Speculum (of the Other) [672]

Suzanne Necker's final years were filled with almost continual suffering; at numerous points, she was on the verge of death. "Ma mère se meurt sous deux mois," wrote Germaine de Staël in February 1794, invoking the reflexive in order to assert her mother's conscious and active involvement in the process of her own

---

[670] Goodman reads Pigalle's work as a sign of democratization: "In a dominant socety in which the visible sign of social status was dress, in which inequality found expression in the clothes one was permitted to wear, the nudity of the statue is most obviously a denial of the inequalities upon which that dominant society was based." See Dena Goodman, "Pigalle's *Voltaire nu*: The Republic of Letters Represents Itself to the World," *Representations* 16 (1986): 104.

[671] Curchod Necker, *Mélanges*, 3:174.

[672] Luce Irigaray, in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, USA: Cornell University Press, 1985), posits the female body as the speculum that reveals her exclusion from the philosophical tradition.

dying.[673] Indeed, this final act, the public staging and memorialization of Suzanne Necker as cadaver, was most theatrical in nature. During the final years of her life, she laid full claim to her frail corporeality in a performative tour-de-force in which the rituals of dying, death, burial, and memory converged into an astounding display of specularity. What, however, does a specular death mean? What might it entail? What purpose does such a theatrical gesture serve? Why was Suzanne Necker, a pious woman so convinced by the promise of eternal life that she once suggested that the body was nothing more than a flawed temporary container for her soul,[674] so concerned with the permanence of that same infirm shell?

I use the term specular evoking all of its connotations. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, it relates to the qualities of reflection, transparency, or mirroring.[675] That which is specular opens itself up to the external gaze, revealing hidden depths and mysteries. By invoking specularity, I also gesture toward the speculum, the medical device most commonly used for turning the gaze into the female body. It is, after all, the speculum–as an instrument or tool–which facilitates the specularity of the body. In this sense, speculum and specularity are deeply

---

[673] There are numerous hints of suicidality in Madame Necker's letters, particularly in her lengthy meditations directed towards God, where she writes: "Peut-être porté-je dans mon sein le principe de ma destruction; à quoi bon faire tant d'efforts pour le détruire?" (Quoted in Haussonville, *Salon*, 2:14). However, her letters also attest to a strong commitment to Calvinist interdictions against suicide; namely, the idea that God, as the author of all life, has the ultimate authority over the moment of her death. She writes, for example, "Je me confie entièrement en toi, soit que je meure, soit que je vive" (Quoted in Haussonville, *Salon*, 2:19). For more on the relationships between Calvinism and suicide, see Jeffrey R. Watt, *Choosing Death: Suicide and Calvinism in Early Modern Geneva* (Kirksville, USA: Truman State University Press, 2001).

[674] Curchod Necker, *Mélanges*, 1:141.

[675] *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. "specular," http://dictionary.oed.com.proxy.lib.sfu.ca/cgi/entry/50232758?single=1&query_type=word&queryword=specular&first=1&max_to_show=10 (accessed June 13, 2007).

intertwined: that which is specular can also, by definition, be understood as the speculum–the source of specularity–itself.

The death, burial, and veneration of Madame Necker can be approached from each of these angles. On the one hand, the specular rituals of memorialization reflected and revealed her deep religious belief and spiritual stance. Necker's conscious self-positioning within the horror of the suffering body suggests a gesture of penitence in which she claimed the sins of her society in a final attempt to absolve herself of sin. The process of dying, by bringing her closer to eternal communion, was redemptive: "mes défauts seront effacés par cette éponge de la mort."[676] On the other hand, these rituals, by focusing the gaze on the frail corporeal machine, transformed the body itself into a speculum. The dying body, however, did not reveal itself; rather, it reflected back the gaze of the spectators, who, in witnessing corporeal decrepitude, were forced to re-evaluate themselves.[677] Like *Voltaire nu*, Madame Necker's embalmed remains transformed the observer into the observed. Such, indeed, was the horror of death. In this sense, Madame Necker's mimetic refusal, which began as a conscious resistance to the elite sociable imperative, had come full circle.

Imagining Exile

When Suzanne Necker fled France with her family in 1790, she retraced the footsteps of her mother and grandmother before her. Exile, which had haunted her

---

[676] Curchod Necker, *Mélanges*, 3:174.

[677] For more on the paradoxical relationships between speculum, specularity, and the gaze, see the work of Luce Irigaray, in particular *Speculum of the Other Woman*. Irigaray's "speculum," located at the core of her work, spatially mimics the specularity of the female body, even as this body, by its lack of definition, undermines the reflective principle of the mirror.

memory and signaled her entry into adulthood, now also marked the end of her life. The Necker family was not alone in their flight. All told, some 150,000 people fled France during the revolutionary period, among them members of all social classes. Like the Huguenot refugees before them, revolutionary *émigrés* faced many dangers: revolutionary laws imposed between 1791 and 1794 threatened them with the confiscation of their property, the dissolution of their marriages, and even death.[678] *Emigrés* faced an uncertain future and many fled precipitously, leaving both material goods and family behind.[679] For most, it was, in William Doyle's words, "a futile sacrifice. None of them ever recovered all they lost, and most would have lost less by staying."[680] They were profoundly unprepared for the difficult reality that awaited them and many were resistant to assimilation in their new situations.[681]

Unlike most *émigrés*, many of whom anticipated temporary exile in foreign climes and returned to France within ten years of their departure,[682] Suzanne Necker was at the same time ex-patriated and repatriated. When she left Paris in 1790, she

---

[678] Rosena Davison, "Time and Exile: The Case of Mme la Marquise de Lage de Volude," *Lumen: Selected Proceedings from the Canadian Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, XVIII (1999): 71.

[679] The experiences of Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun and the Marquise de La Tour de Pin, who fled precipitously and led nomadic existences abroad, exemplify the experience of many elite émigrés. See Henriette-Lucy Dillon, Marquise de La Tour du Pin, *Mémoires de la Marquise de La Tour du Pin: Journal d'une femme de cinquante ans, 1778-1815* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1989); Louise-Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, *The memoirs of Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun*, trans. Siân Evans (London, UK: Camden Press, 1989).

[680] William Doyle, "Introduction," in *The French émigrés in Europe and the Struggle against Revolution, 1789-1814*, eds. Kirsty Carpenter and Philip Mansel (Houndmills, UK: MacMillan Press Ltd., 1999), xxi.

[681] Kirsty Carpenter notes that for the émigrés in Britain, "London was a culture shock" (Kirsty Carpenter, "London: Capital of the Emigration," in *The French émigrés in Europe and the Struggle against Revolution, 1789-1814*, 46), a view echoed by Thomas C. Sosnowski, who observes that, émigrés in the United States had little knowledge of the English language and lived in relative isolation in the new country (Thomas C. Sosnowski, "French Émigrés in the United States," in *The French émigrés in Europe and the Struggle against Revolution, 1789-1814*, 139-40).

[682] Carpenter, "London," 59. William Doyle confirms that, "by the time Napoleon fell, nine-tenths of the émigres had already returned to France" (Doyle, "Introduction," xix).

had spent as many years yearning for her homeland, Switzerland, as she had living in it. Even as she had struggled to maintain her religious and cultural alterity, she was, by this time, a true cultural hybrid, with an identity equally informed by the simple Calvinist idyll of her youth and the seductive, intellectual abandon of her Parisian social circle.

At one stage in her life, Madame Necker had eagerly anticipated her return to Vaud.[683] But the Switzerland of her imagination bore little resemblance to the country to which she returned in 1790. The loose assembly of cantons and cities, increasingly politically unstable, was veering towards revolution.[684] Lausanne was overrun with *émigrés* and many of Necker's close friends had died. Etienette Clavel de Brenles, with whom she had shared her excitement and fear of the French capital, died in 1777, a loss closely followed by that of Necker's surrogate mother and confessor, Henriette Réverdil, in 1779. Finally, Paul Moultou, the friend of her youth who intervened on her behalf during her aborted engagement to Edward Gibbon, and later encouraged her to travel to Paris, had died in 1787.

On a personal level, too, Suzanne Necker found herself surprisingly ill at ease in her former home. Even though she had once attributed her illnesses to her Parisian life, they did not abate upon her return to her homeland; if anything, they became worse: according to Germaine de Staël, "[S]a santé souffre extrêmement de

---

[683] Recall, for example, her comments to Etienette Clavel de Brenles regarding "l'air natal" (Curchod Necker, Letter to Etienette Clavel de Brenles, Paris, juin 1765, IS1915/xxx/h/1, BCUL; see also Golowkin, *Lettres diverses*, 282).

[684] Regional tensions, which escalated as a result of the French Revolution, led to the 1798 Swiss revolution, during with French armies invaded Switzerland (at the behest of some Swiss revolutionary leaders). Among other things, the short-lived Helvetic Republic (1798-1803) abolished the feudal rights of the cantons and instituted freedom of religion.

l'air et de l'ennui de ce pays."[685] Staël's commentary, while directly informed by her own profound ambivalence towards Switzerland, suggests that her mother now possessed a curiously composite identity. Torn between two worlds, Necker had an uncomfortable foothold in each. While nostalgia and duty tethered her to Switzerland, and evoked in her a horror of all things French,[686] she nevertheless experienced the significant personal loss of intimate French friends and colleagues, among them Buffon, Thomas, and the great Geoffrin, memories that linked her directly to her Parisian life.

From the perspective of Suzanne Necker's multi-stage palliative model, these final years can be conceived as the last, indeterminate stage of life, and as such, as the corollary, of sorts, to her own mother's sufferings and death. Seen in this light, Necker's final years form a curious coda, an extended leave-taking in which she could intimately reflect upon her life, her actions, and her beliefs. This leave-taking manifested itself in a series of commemorative gestures and acts. It is through Madame Necker's final letters to her husband, for example, that she acknowledged that she had fulfilled her conjugal duties:

---

[685] Staël, *Correspondance générale*, 1:384. See also Staël's letter to her husband, dated at Coppet, 11 November 1790, which again makes reference to air quality, "Elle est bien souffrante, ma pauvre mere. L'air de ce pays lui est bien mauvais" (1:389). Staël's statements invert Madame Necker's previously cited comments to Madame de Brenles in which she attributed illness to her need for "l'air natal."

[686] "[M]a mère...conserve un ressentiment contre la France qui tient de la manie. Avant de sentir une fleur dans ses promenades, elle demande si elle est sur terre de France..." (Staël, *Correspondance générale*, 1:437).

> Vierge et pure, quand je fis le serment de t'être fidèle, j'ai tenu mon sermen, dans toute sa délicatesse; et, je n'ai pas besoin de te le dire, c'est un foible mérite, que celui d'avoir vécu dans l'innocence avant de se marier, et d'être restée parfaitement chaste dans le cours d'une longue union.[687]

In so doing, she outlined not only her sexual fidelity, but also her moral and emotional fidelity to a relationship which had formed the centre of her adult experience.[688]

Her relationship with her daughter, however, was more complicated. Germaine is not mentioned in any of the final letters; nor was she considered in the context of Suzanne Necker's elaborate funeral plans, which called only for her husband Jacques' embalmed remains to join his wife's upon his death. This omission is both curious and, at the same time, to be expected. On the one hand, if Madame Necker was indeed using the rituals of death as a way of taking stock of her life, then it would be obvious to include her reflections on her maternal role. After all, she was clearly aware of–and responsive to–her responsibility to her daughter. On the other hand, Germaine's personal life, in particular the complexities surrounding her amorous relationship with Louis de Narbonne[689] and her desire to divorce the Baron de Staël, all of which took place during Madame Necker's final illness, were sources of great distress and profound disappointment to her mother. Narbonne, a known libertine, represented the antithesis of all of Suzanne Necker's careful teachings and she had previously forbidden her daughter to receive him. Germaine, however, took

---

[687] Staël, *Notice*, 329-30.

[688] These final letters are also a testament to her concern for the suffering of others. In them, she ensured that her financial responsibilities towards impoverished family members would continue through Jacques Necker's stewardship. Staël, *Notice*, 330-31.

[689] Louis-Marie de Narbonne Lara (1755-1813), a noted general, was the French Minister of War between 1791 and 1792. After the revolution, he spent some time as ambassador in Vienna.

little heed of her mother's concerns and flew headlong into a passionate affair (which ended, predictably, disastrously). Madame Necker was horrified, and, in a particularly heated moment, blamed her ill health directly on her daughter's indiscretions. As Germaine recounted with defiance:

> Ma mère avait faillie mourir pendant la nuit d'un étouffement horrible. Elle m'a fait demander. Elle m'a dit: "Ma fille, je meurs de la douleur que m'a causée votre coupable et public attachement. Vous en êtes punie par la conduite de son objet envers vous: elle rompt ce que mes prières n'ont pu vous faire abandonner. Ce sont les soins que vous rendrez à votre père qui vous obtiendront mon pardon dans le ciel. Ne me répondez rien. Sortez: je n'ai pas la force de disputer dans ce moment." Je suis sortie en effet, et l'on ne meurt pas puisque je ne suis pas morte.[690]

What can we make of this statement? To a contemporary ear, Madame Necker's words are vindictive and cruel and recall the repressive power and rigid strictures of early Calvinism. This stern and judgmental mother would appear to fully merit the critiques of her daughter's biographers. To whom, however, are her harsh admonishments directed?

Read in the light of Suzanne Necker's experiences and beliefs, another picture emerges. Superimposed over Madame Necker's dying are the spectre of her mother's death, the memory of her own failed filial virtue, and the reality to her of Calvinist culpability. In this sense, Madame Necker's stern rebuke could just as easily be seen to have been addressed to herself. On an intimate level, Necker's rituals of dying and death might be conceived as part of the idea of maternal abjection, a claiming, through corporeal sensibility, of her daughter's moral disarray, and from there, a gesture towards filial–and maternal–atonement.

---

[690] Staël, *Correspondance générale*, 2:253.

Corporeal commemoration

Such a postulation can also, I believe, be taken a step further. If Suzanne Necker's illness can be perceived as part of a context of large-scale critical abjection in which she took on expiation of the social and moral ills of elite society through a process of self-stigmatization, then her specular death can be seen as a further extension of that process. This would imply that Madame Necker's body, by reflecting the social illness to which it was prey, was no longer marked, but became the mark, a physical representation of stigma enacted on a public stage. She no longer claimed the stigma; rather, her corpse was itself the stigma. Her abject body represented both the reality of loss which characterized her entire adult life, and also, the absolute dissipation and excess of the *ancien régime*, thus symbolizing, on the one hand, her active engagement in what she perceived to be a sinful society, and, on the other, evoking the promise of purity and redemption.

Such a positioning is inherently political in nature, particularly in the context of the French and Swiss Revolutions, and would appear to be far removed from Necker's own religious beliefs and domestic behaviors. But it does accord with the approach taken by her husband and first biographer, who, in the introduction to the posthumously published *Mélange*s, argued that his wife should be seen as a symbol of morality in a society dedicated to excess.[691] More importantly, it accords with the public activities that governed the last decade of Madame Necker's life. Her charity hospital and writings on premature burial and divorce were all overtly political

[691] Jacques Necker cites the words of Thomas in order to support his intimate impressions of his wife: "[E]lle est parvenue à une pureté et à une élévation de caractère qui a peu d'exemples, et qui est si for au-dessus du pays et du siècle méprisable où elle vit" (Jacques Necker, "Observations de l'éditeur," 1:xvii-xviii).

statements in a society on the brink of revolution. From this perspective, her curtain call seems particularly *à propos*.

If we understand Suzanne Necker's role, within the context of sensibility, as the mother of humanity–the embodiment of the characteristics of sensibility as defined by Jaucourt[692]–and if we posit her sick body as the corporeal representation of societal illness, then her role expands. As "mère de l'humanité," Necker both spoke on behalf of *l'humanité souffrante* and claimed her maternal legacy. Her death, therefore, was a martyr's death; her highly ritualized funerary rites, a martyr's rites. Her body, guaranteed to exist in perpetuity, was the stigma itself–the wound and the fissure–a constant and enduring reminder of human frailty and suffering which bore the sins of the world, and by its very abjection, extended absolution.

Agonie and *Cadavre*

Suzanne Necker's tomb is located in a small, wooded burial plot on the grounds of the family château in Coppet, Switzerland. Completely hidden from the public gaze, the small, stone tomb has not been opened since the death of Germaine de Staël. Inside, Suzanne Necker's carefully embalmed cadaver, now joined by those of her husband and daughter, functions as a symbolic reminder of the emotional power of the dying body. Permanently preserved in the state of illness which marked Madame Necker's adult years, this corpse does not rest, but remains in a position of perpetual suspension, hovering eternally at the point between life and death, *agonie* and *cadavre*. Its abject presence cannot–and must not–be tamed. Instead, it bears

692 "[La] disposition tendre & délicate de l'âme, qui la rend facile à être touchée...la sensibilité est la mère de l'humanité, de la générosité; elle sert d mérite, secourt l'esprit, & entraîne la persuasion à sa suite" (Louis de Jaucourt, "Sensibilité (morale)," in *Encyclopédie*, 15:52).

witness to corporeal dignity and offers a moving testimony to Suzanne Necker's heartfelt outcry: "Qui peut réfléchir sur cet état affreux, & ne pas se regarder comme le protecteur des mourans, quels qu'ils puissent être!"[693]

By voluntarily inhabiting the abject, Suzanne Necker offered a profound reconceptualization of the relationship between life and death. As Winslow, through Bruhier, indicated at the beginning of the debate around premature burial, death is certain and it is not. The uncertainty of death, as projected through the instability of Suzanne Necker's ill and dying body, reveals not only the fear of death–as exemplified in the extended discourse on premature burial–but also the potential that exists in malady, that ambiguous space between life and death.[694] By consciously living her dying–by laying claim to corporeal abjection–Suzanne Necker emphasized the inherent dignity of the frail and suffering body, and authorized its role as the site for the performance and presentation of the autobiographical self.

---

[693] Curchod Necker, *Inhumations*, 7.

[694] Recall the *Encyclopédie* definition of illness, which positions it as an intermediate stage between life and death ("Maladie," in *Encyclopédie*, 9:929).

Postscript: Sin and Redemption

The dying, death, and burial of Germaine de Staël, in July 1817, function as a curious postscript to Suzanne Necker's performance of filial and maternal abjection. Like her mother, Staël spent her final years in extreme suffering and pain. Desperate to stave off the loneliness and finality of death, she sought relief through the use of narcotics and refused to sleep, believing each time that she might never wake. Surrounded by family and close friends, she was in full command of her intellect, but no longer able to write.[695] Death came prematurely: when she died, on 14 July 1817, she was only fifty-one years old.

At Madame de Staël's request, her body was transported to Coppet, where it was interred in the tomb that housed the remains of her mother and father. Her son-in-law, Victor de Broglie, presided over both the preparations and the ceremony, which took place on 28 July 1817. The Necker-Curchod tomb had not been opened since the death of Jacques Necker in 1804. Broglie reported that he found the tomb chamber empty, save for the black marble basin, still half filled with alcohol, which contained the remains of Suzanne and Jacques Necker. Their bodies lay close

[695] Her daughter, Albertine, acted as her secretary (Fairweather, *Staël*, 462).

together, stretched out under a red cloak. Jacques Necker's face, still visible above the cloak, was perfectly preserved.[696]

Madame de Staël was placed at the foot of the basin. As Broglie recalled:

> Le cortège s'arrêta à l'entrée de l'enclos. Il ne pénétra dans le monument que mon beau-frère et moi; suivis de quatre hommes qui portaient le cercueil. Il fut déposé au pied de la cuve. Je fis mûrer de nouveau la porte d'entrée qui depuis n'a plus été ouverte.[697]

The door, permanently closed, was sealed with a *bas-relief* depicting all three members of the family: Germaine de Staël, weeping over her parents' tomb, her mother in heaven, and Jacques, between them, looking to his wife even as he reached back to his daughter.[698]

Suzanne Necker, if we recall, had specifically requested that her tomb be opened only once after her death: to welcome the embalmed body of her husband, that his remains could mingle with hers, thus extending their marriage into eternity. Through this process, she sought to confirm the strength of the conjugal union, to alleviate the burden of moral responsibility, and to resist the lonely exile of the sinful believer. What purpose, however, might her daughter's final act have served? To speculate further on this, I turn briefly to Germaine de Staël's fictional output, in particular, her heroic novel, *Corinne*. Staël's most famous literary heroine embodied her creator's intellectual and creative desires: with her formidable skill in oratory, creative intellect, boundless passions, and determination to live life on her own

---

[696] Victor de Broglie, *Souvenirs, 1785-1870, du feu duc de Broglie*, ed. Albert de Broglie, 4 vols. (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1886), 1:384.

[697] Broglie, *Souvenirs*, 1:384.

[698] Haussonville, *Salon*, 2:302-303.

terms, Corinne *was* Madame de Staël.[699] Staël, in return, mirrored her heroine. Like Corinne, she confidently asserted herself on the public stage in a virtuoso performance that earned her the adulation of the intelligentsia of her generation. Like Corinne, too, Madame de Staël could confidently assert that she had lived for love.[700]

Unlike Corinne, however, Staël did not die a lonely death. By linking her remains to those of her parents, she gestured towards a happier ending. "Ce qu'il y a de plus sacré dans la morale," she wrote in *De l'influence des passions sur le bonheur des individus et des nations*:

> ce sont les liens des parents et des enfants: la nature et la société reposent également sur ce devoir, et le dernier degré de la dépravation est de braver l'instinct involontaire qui, dans ces relations, nous inspire tout ce que la vertu peut commander. Il y a donc toujours un bonheur certain attaché à de tels liens, l'accomplissement de ses devoirs.[701]

Social responsibility, happiness, duty, and virtue: Staël's language recalls the devout moral stance of her mother, who died just two years before this work was published. Given these echoes, It would be tempting to read Madame de Staël's decision to be interred with her parents as an act of closure, a redemptive gesture in which filial rupture could be exchanged for atonement, absolution, and grace.

There is, however, no evidence to support this. Biographers suggest, in fact, that Staël turned not to the memory her mother for comfort, but rather, to her father

---

[699] Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, in fact, painted her as Corinne (1808-1809).

[700] Germaine de Staël, *Corinne, or Italy*, trans. Avriel H. Goldberger (New Brunswick, USA: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 419.

[701] Germaine de Staël, "De l'influence des passions sur le bonheur des individus et des nations," in *Oeuvres complètes de madame la Baronne de Staël-Holstein*, 3 vols. (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1871), 1:154.

and to God during her final months,[702] linking her paternal memory with religious devotion in much the same way as Suzanne Necker had once sought divine communion with her mother. While Staël's final act may have reunited the corporeal remains of the family, it did not bring peace. Instead, the whole family rests–eternally suspended–in that space between Switzerland and France, life and death, sin and redemption.

[702] Fairweather, *Staël*, 463; 466.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Manuscripts

Bibliothèque nationale de France

N.A.F. 2766

Bibliothèque publique de Genève

Facs. 25/20

ms. 2465; 2628.

ms.fr. 301; 916; 918; 2629; 2631.

ms.suppl 153; 298; 299; 358B; 363; 371; 514; 518; 716; 717; 718; 725; 728; 1036; 1051; 1908; 1909

DO 1/41-2

DO 1932/44; 417; 418; 419; 420; 421; 422; 423; 425.

DO 1931/133

Archives de Saussure 238

ms. Lullin 51

Bibliothèque cantonale et universitaire de Lausanne

IS1915/xxx/h/1; IS1915/xxx/h/3

IS1920km79

IS3784/I/61

IS3784/II/144

IS4371C/28

IS4198

IS4199

IS5283/7-8

Archives cantonales vaudoises

P.Charrière de Sévery: B104/1985; B104/5528-5934; B104/B5535-5937; B104/5538-42; B104/5543-44; B117/3191; B117/3192-95; Bh127.

P. Cuenod-Chavannes/2

P.Duvillard/PP539/377

P.Gaulis/Ba/16

British Library

ADD 34886

Published Works

Abrantès, Laure Junot, Duchesse d'. *Histoire des salons de Paris: Tableaux et portraits du grand monde, sous Louis XVI, le Directoire, le Consulat et l'Empire, la Restauration, et le règne de Louis-Philippe Ier.* 6 vols. Paris: Ladvocat, 1837-1838.

Adams, H.G., ed. *A Cyclopaedia of Female Biography consisting of sketches of all women who have been distinguished by great talents, strength of character, piety, benevolence, or moral virtue of any kind; forming a complete record of womanly excellence or ability.* London: Groombridge and Sons, 1857.

Alderley, Maria Josepha Holroyd Stanley, Baroness of. *The Girlhood of Maria Josepha Holroyd, Lady Stanley of Alderley: Recorded in Letters of a Hundred Years Ago, from 1776 to 1796.* London, England: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1896.

Alison, Archibald. *Some account of my life and writings: an autobiography.* Edited by Lady Alison. Edinburgh: W. Blackwood and Sons, 1883. Thomson Gale. http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/MOML?af=RN&ae=F101310611&srchtp=a&ste=14..

Audiger. *La maison reglée, et l'art de diriger la maison d'un grand seigneur & autres, tant à la ville qu'à la campagne & le devoir de tous les officiers, & autres domestiques en general.* 3rd ed. Amsterdam: Paul Marret, 1700. Thomson Gale, 2008. ttp://galenet.galegroup.com.proxy.lib.sfu.ca/servlet/MOME?af=RN&ae=U100391327&srchtp=a&ste=14.

Bachaumont, Louis Petit de. *Mémoires secrets pour servir à l'histoire de la République des Lettres en France depuis MDCCLXII, ou Journal d'un observateur, contenant les analyses des pièces de théâtre qui ont paru durant cet intervalle, les relations des assemblée littéraires...* 36 vols. London: John Adamson, 1783-1789.

Bary, René de. *L'esprit de cour, ou conversations galantes.* Paris, 1662.

Bentham, Jeremy. *Panopticum; or, The inspection-house.* 3 vols. London: R. Baldwin, 1791.

Bernardin de Saint Pierre, Jacques-Henri. *Paul et Virginie*. Paris: Imprimerie de Monsieur, 1789.

Boigne, Louise-Eléonore-Charlotte-Adélaide d'Osmond, Comtesse de. *Mémoires de la Comtesse de Boigne née d'Osmond*. Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1908.

Broglie, Victor de. *Souvenirs, 1785-1870, du feu duc de Broglie*. Edited by Albert de Broglie. 4 vols. Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1886.

Buffon, Georges Louis Leclerc, Comte de. *Correspondance inédite de Buffon*. Edited by Henri Nadault de Buffon. 2 vols. Paris: Hachette, 1860.

Buffon, Georges Louis Leclerc, Comte de. *Histoire naturelle générale et particulière*. 21 vols. Paris: Imprimerie du Roy, 1749-89.

Burlamaqui, Jean-Jacques. *Principes du droit naturel*. 2 vols. Geneva: Barrillot, 1748.

Calvin, Jean. "A tous amateurs de Jésus-Christ et de son Évangile, Salut [1535]." In *La vraie pitié: Divers traités de Jean Calvin et Confession de foi de Guillaume Farel*, edited by Irena Backus and Claire Chimelli, 25-38. Geneva: Labor et Fides.

Calvin, Jean. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Edited by John T. McNeill. Translated by Ford Lewis Battles. 2 vols. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960.

Calvin, Jean. *The Letters of John Calvin*. Translated by Dr. Jules Bonnet. 4 vols. New York: Burt Franklin, 1972.

Charrière, Isabelle de. *Lettres de Mistriss Henley publiées par son amie*. Edited by Joan Hinde Stewart and Philip Stewart. New York: Modern Language Association, 1993.

Curchod Necker, Suzanne. *Des inhumations précipitées*. Paris: Imprimerie royale, 1790.

[Curchod Necker, Suzanne]. *Hospice de charité*. Paris: Imprimerie royale, 1781.

[Curchod Necker, Suzanne]. *Hospice de charité: institutions, règles, et usages de cette Maison*. Paris: Imprimerie royale, 1780.

Curchod Necker, Suzanne. *Mélanges*. 3 vols. Paris: Pougens, 1798.

Curchod Necker, Suzanne. *Nouveaux Mélanges*. 2 vols. Paris: Pougens, 1801.

Curchod Necker, Suzanne. *Réflexions sur le divorce*. Lausanne: Durant, Ravanel et cie.; Paris: P.F.Aubin et Desenne, 1794.

Curchod Necker, Suzanne. *Réflexions sur le divorce*. Paris: A. Michel, 1928.

Dashkova, Ekaterina Romanovna. *The Memoirs of Princess Dashkova*. Translated by Kyril Fitzlyon. Durham, USA and London, UK: Duke University Press, 1995.

Delille, Jacques. *Oeuvres de J. Delille*. 2 vols. Paris: Lefèvre, 1844.

Dentière, Marie. *Epistle to Marguerite de Navarre and Preface to a Sermon by John Calvin*. Translated by Mary B. McKinley. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.

Dictionnaire de l'Académie françoise. 4th Edition. 2 vols. Paris: Bernard Brunet, 1762.

Dictionnaire de l'Académie françoise. 2 vols. Paris: J.B. Coignard, 1694.

Dictionnaire de l'Académie françoise. 5th Edition. 2 vols. Paris: J.J. Smits, 1798-99.

Diderot, Denis and Jean Le Rond d'Alembert, eds. *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, par une Société de Gens de lettres*. 28 vols. Paris, 1751-1772 .

Diderot, Denis. *Oeuvres complètes*. Edited by J. Assézat. 20 vols. Paris: Garnier, 1875-77.

Diderot, Denis. *Rameau's Nephew and d'Alembert's Dream*. Translated by L.W. Tancock. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1966.

Diderot, Denis. *The Nun*. Translated by Russell Goulbourne. London and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Doublet, François. *Hospice de Charité, Année 1788*. Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1789.

Du Bosc, Jacques. *The accomplish'd woman. Written in French by M. Du Boscq*. 2 vols. London: J. Watts, 1753. Eighteenth-Century Collections Online. http://galenet.galegroup.com.proxy.lib.sfu.ca/servlet/ECCO.

Duguet. *Conduite d'une dame chrétienne pour vivre saintement dans le monde*. 3rd ed. Paris: Jacques Estienne, 1730.

Epinay, Louise Florence Pétronille Tardieu d'Esclavelles, Marquise d'. *Les Contre-Confessions: Histoire de Madame de Montbrillant*. Edited by Elisabeth Badinter and Georges Roth. Paris: Mercure de France, 1989.

Epinay, Louise Florence Pétronille Tardieu d'Esclavelles, Marquise d'. *Les Conversations d'Emilie*. Edited by Rosena Davison. Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1996.

Faret, Nicolas. *L'Honneste homme, ou l'art de plaire à la cour*. Paris: T. du Bray, 1630.

Faret, Nicolas. *The art of pleasing at court being a translation (with some additions) of an old French book, entitled L'honneste homme; ou l'art de plaire à la cour.* Birmingham: T. Aris, 1754.

Garrick, David. *The Private Correspondence of David Garrick with the most celebrated persons of his time*. Edited by James Boaden. 2 vols. London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1832.

Genlis, Stéphanie Félicité Ducrest de Saint Aubin, Comtesse de. *De l'influence des femmes sur la littérature française, comme protectrices des lettres et comme auteurs; ou précis de l'histoire des femmes françaises les plus célèbres.* Paris: Maradin, 1811 .

Genlis, Stéphanie Félicité Ducrest de Saint Aubin, Comtesse de. *Mémoires inédits de Madame la Comtesse de Genlis, sur le dix-huitième siècle et la révolution*

française, depuis 1756 jusqu'à nos jours. 10 vols. Brussels: P.J. de Mat, 1825.

Genlis, Stéphanie Félicité DuCrest de Saint Aubin, Comtesse de. *The Rival Mothers, or Calumny.* 4 vols. London: Strahan, 1800. Eighteenth-Century Collections Online. http://galenet.galegroup.com.proxy.lib.sfu.ca/servlet/ECCO.

Gibbon, Edward. *Gibbon's Journal to January 28th,* 1763. Edited by D.M. Low. London: Chatto & Windus, 1929.

Gibbon, Edward. *Letters.* Edited by J.E. Norton. 3 vols. London: Cassell, 1956.

Golowkin, Fédor. *Lettres diverses, recueillies en Suisse.* Geneva: J.J. Paschoud, 1821.

Grenaille, François de. *L'Honneste fille.* Paris, 1640.

Grenaille, François de. *Les plaisirs des dames.* Paris: Gervais Clousier, 1641.

Grimm, Friedrich Melchior, Freiherr von. *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique.* 16 vols. Paris: Garnier frères, 1877.

L'Homme de lettres et l'homme du monde. Orléans: Couret de Villeneuve le jeune, 1774.

La Chétardie, Trotti de, chevalier. *A letter to a young lady of distinction at the court of France. Containing remarks on religion, morality, politeness, love, gallantry, &c. ....*London: J. Robinson, 1745. Eighteenth-Century Collections Online. http://galenet.galegroup.com.proxy.lib.sfu.ca/servlet/ECCO.

La galérie des dames françoises. London, 1798.

"Lettre des ces dames à M. Necker, suivie des Doléances très-graves." In *Les Tracts féministes au XVIIIe siècle,* edited by Colette Michael, 85-92. Geneva and Paris: Slatkine, 1986.

La Rochefoucauld, François de. *Élémens de politesse et de bienséance : suivi d'un manuel moral, ou des maximes pour se conduire sagement dans le monde.* 2nd ed. Liège: Chez F.J. Desoer, 1781.

La Tour du Pin, Henriette Lucy Dillon, Marquise de. *Mémoires de la Marquise de La Tour du Pin: Journal d'une femme de cinquante ans, 1778-1846.* Edited by Christian de Liederkerke Beaufort. Paris: Mercure de France, 2002.

Lambert, Anne Thérèse de Marguenat de Courcelles, Marquise de. *The Marchioness de Lambert's letters to her son and daughter, on true education, &c. &c. &c.* London: M. Cooper, 1749. Eighteenth Century Collections Online. http://galenet.galegroup.com.proxy.lib.sfu.ca/servlet/ECCO.

Le Sans Culotte, 15 Thermidor, l'an II de la Liberté et de l'Egalité (2 Aout ère arabienne).

Les deux conversations de Madame Necker, Femme du Directeur des Finances en France. Genève: Cruchaut, 1781.

Lespinasse, Julie de. *Lettres.* 1809. Reprint, Paris: La Table Ronde, 1997.

Lespinassy, Mlle. de. *Essai sur l'éducation des demoiselles*. Paris: Hocherau, 1764.

Lettre de ces dames à M. Necker. Paris, 1789.

M***, M. *Discours sur les hommes; ou nouvelle apologie des femmes*. Paris, 1755.

Marmontel, Jean-François. *Oeuvres complètes.*7 vols. Paris: 1819-20. Reprint, Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1968.

Michael, Colette, ed. *Les tracts féministes au XVIIIe siècle*. Geneva and Paris: Slatkine, 1986.

Morellet, André. *Mémoires inédits de l'abbé Morellet*. 2nd ed. 2 vols. Paris: Baudoin, 1822.

Necker de Saussure, Albertine-Adrienne. *Sketch of the Life, Character, and Writings of Baroness de Staël-Holstein*. London: Treuttel and Würtz, 1820.

Necker, Jacques. *Compte Rendu au Roy*. Paris: Imprimerie royale, 1781.

Necker, Jacques. *De l'importance des opinions réligieuses*. Liège: C. Pomteux, 1788.

Norvins, Jacques Marquet de Montbreton de. *Mémorial de J. de Norvins: Souvenirs d'un historien de Napoléon*. 3 vols. Paris: Plon, 1896.

Oberkirch, Henriette-Louise de Waldner de Freundstein, Baronne d'. *Mémoires de la Baronne d'Oberkirch*. 2 vols. Paris: Charpentier, 1869.

Paradis de Moncrif, François-Augustin. *Essais sur la nécessité et sur les moyens de plaire*. Paris: Prault, 1738.

Pomme, Pierre. *Traité des affections vapoureuses des deux sexes*. 2nd ed. Lyon: Benoit Duplain, 1765.

Prévost, Pierre, ed. *Notice sur la vie et les écrits de Georges-Louis LeSage*. Geneva and Paris: J.J. Paschoud, 1805.

Raulin, Joseph. *Traité des affections vapoureuses du sexe*. Paris: Jean-Thomas Hérissant, 1758.

Rilliet Huber, Catherine. "Notes sur l'enfance de Madame de Staël."*Occident et cahiers staëliens* 2, no. 1 (June 1933): 39-47.

Rilliet Huber, Catherine. "Notes sur l'enfance de Madame de Staël (suite et fin)." *Occident et cahiers staëliens* 2, no. 2 (March 1934): 140-46.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Correspondance complète de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*. Edited by R.A. Leigh. 52 vols. Geneva: Institut et musée Voltaire, 1965-.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Emile*. Translated by Barbara Foxley. London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1974.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Lettres de deux amants habitants d'une petite ville au pied des Alpes*. 6 vols. Amsterdam: Marc Michel Rey, 1761. Reprinted in 2 vols. as *Julie, ou, La nouvelle Héloïse*, with preface and notes by Henri Coulet. Paris: Le livre de poche, 2002.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *The Confessions and Correspondence, Including the Letters to Malesherbes*. Translated by Christopher Kelly. Edited by Christopher Kelly, Roger D. Masters, and Peter G. Stillman. Hanover, USA: University Press of New England, 1995.

Roussel, Pierre. *Système physique et moral de la femme ou Tableau philosophique de la constitution, des moeurs et des fonctions propres au sexe*. Paris: Vincent, 1775.

Roze de l'Epinay. *Avis aux mères qui veulent allaiter*. Paris: P.F. Didot, le jeune, 1785.

Scudéry, Madeleine de. *Clélie: histoire romaine*. 5 vols. Paris, 1660. Reprinted with preface and notes by Chantal Morlet-Chantalat. 5 vols. Paris: Champion, 2001.

Staël, Auguste de. *Notice sur M. Necker*. Paris: Treuttel et Würtz, 1820.

Staël, Germaine de. "De l'influence des passions sur le bonheur des individus et des nations." In *Oeuvres complètes de madame la Baronne de Staël-Holstein*, 3 vols. Paris: Firmin Didot, 1871.

Staël, Germaine de. "Mon Journal." *Cahiers staëliens* 28 (1980): 55-79.

Staël, Germaine de. *Corinne, or Italy*. Translated by Avriel H. Goldberger. New Brunswick, USA: Rutgers University Press, 1987.

Staël, Germaine de. *Correspondance générale*. Edited by B. W. Jasinski. 4 vols. Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1962-1978.

Staël, Germaine de. *Mémoires sur la vie privée de mon père*. Paris: Colburn, 1818.

Tenon, Jacques. *Mémoires sur les hôpitaux de Paris*. Paris: Chez Royez, libraire, 1788.

The iudgement of the synode holden at Dort, concerning the fiue Articles. London: John Bill, 1619.

Thiéry, François. *La vie de l'homme respectée et défendue dans ses derniers momens, ou Instruction sur les soins qu'on doit aux morts et à ceux qui paraissent l'être, sur les funérailles et les sépultures*. Paris: Debure l'aîné, 1787.

Thomas, Antoine Léonard. *Essai sur le caractère, les moeurs et l'esprit des femmes dans les différens siècles*. Paris: chez Moutard, 1772 .

Thomas, Antoine-Léonard. *Oeuvres complètes de Thomas*. 6 vols. Paris: chez Verdière and Firmin Didot, 1825.

Tissot, Samuel-Auguste-André-David. *Avis au peuple sur sa santé*. Dernière édition. 2 vols. Paris: P.-F. Didot le jeune, 1782.

Tissot, Samuel-Auguste-André-David. *De la santé des gens de lettres*. Lausanne: François Grasset et Comp.; Lyon: Benoit Duplain, 1758.

Tissot, Samuel-Auguste-André-David. *Essai sur les maladies des gens du monde*. Lausanne: François Grasset et Comp., 1770.

Vaumorière, M. de Pierre Ortigue . *The art of pleasing in conversation: in French and English. Written by the famous Cardinal Richelieu.* London, 1722. Eighteenth-Century Collections Online. http://galenet.galegroup.com.proxy.lib.sfu.ca/servlet/ECCO

Venel, Jean-André. *Essai sur la santé et sur l'éducation médicinale des filles destinées au mariage.* Yverdon: Chez la Société Littéraire & Typographique, 1776.

Vigée-Lebrun, Louise-Elisabeth. *The memoirs of Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun.* Translated by Siân Evans. London, UK: Camden Press, 1989.

Vigée-Lebrun, Louise-Elisabeth. *Souvenirs de Madame Louise-Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun.* 3 vols. Paris: 1835-37. Reprinted with a preface by Claudine Herrmann. Paris: Des Femmes, 1984.

Voltaire, François Marie Arouet de. *The Complete Works of Voltaire.* Edited by Theodore Besterman et al. 141 vols. Geneva: Institut et Muse□e Voltaire; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968-.

Walpole, Horace. *Correspondence of Horace Walpole.* 3 vols. London: Henry Colburn, 1837.

Weber, Joseph. *Mémoires de Weber, concernant Marie-Antoinette, archiduchesse d'Autriche et reine de France et de Navarre.* Edited by Berville and Barrière. Paris, 1822.

Secondary Sources

Ackerknecht, Erwin. *Medicine at the Paris Hospital.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967.

Aimes, Alexandre. "Le séjour de Madame Necker à Montpellier: Fondation de l'hôpital Necker de Montpellier." *Histoire des sciences médicales* 8 (1974) : 477-89.

Aldis, Janet. *Madame Geoffrin: Her Salon and her Times, 1750-1777.* New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons and Methuen and Co., 1905.

Andlau, Béatrice d' *La jeunesse de Madame de Staël.* Paris and Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1970.

Ariès, Philippe. *The Hour of Our Death.* Translated by Helen Weaver. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981.

Ariès, Philippe. *Western Attitudes Towards Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present.* Translated by Patricia M. Ranum. Baltimore, USA and London, UK: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977.

Azouvi, François. "Woman as a Model of Pathology in the Eighteenth Century." *Diogènes* 115 (1981): 22-36.

Backus, Irena and Claire Chimelli, eds. *La vraie pitié: Divers traités de Jean Calvin et Confession de foi de Guillaume Farel.* Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1986.

Badinter, Elisabeth. *Emilie, Emilie, ou l'ambition féminine au XVIIIe siècle*. Paris: Flammarion, 1983.

Badinter, Elisabeth. *The Myth of Motherhood: An Historical View of the Maternal Instinct*. Translated by Roger De Garis. London: Souvenir Press, 1981.

Baecque, Antoine de. *Glory and Terror: Seven Deaths under the French Revolution*. Translated by Charlotte Mandell. New York: Routledge, 2001.

Baecque, Antoine de. *The Body Politic: Corporeal Metaphor in Revolutionary France, 1770-1800*. Translated by Charlotte Mandell. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997.

Barras, Vincent and Micheline Louis-Courvoisier, eds. *La médecine des Lumières: tout autour de Tissot*. Geneva, Switzerland and Paris, France: Georg Editeur, 2001.

Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. Translated by H.M. Parshley. New York: Vintage Books, 1989.

Benedict, Philip. *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002 .

Benedict, Philip. *The Faith and Fortunes of France's Huguenots, 1600-85*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2001.

Benrekassa, Georges. "Diderot et l'honnête femme: de Mme Necker à Eliza Draper," In *Colloque International Diderot 1713-1784*, edited by Anne-Marie Chouille, 87-97. Paris: Aux amateurs de livres, 1995.

Bérenguier, Nadine. "Lettres de Suzanne Necker à Antoine Thomas." In *Lettres de femmes: Textes inedits et oubliés du XVIe au XVIIIe siècle*, edited by Elizabeth C. Goldsmith and Colette H. Winn, 339-378. Paris: Honoré Champion, 2005.

Bergmann, Emilie L. "Language and 'Mother's Milk': Maternal Roles and the Nurturing Body in Early Modern Spanish Texts." In *Maternal Measures: Figuring caregiving in the early modern period*, edited by Naomi J. Miller and Naomi Yavneh, 105-20. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2000.

Bial, Henry, ed. *Performance Studies Reader*. 2nd ed. London and New York: Routledge, 2007.

Biéler, André. *L'homme et la femme dans la morale calviniste*. Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1962.

Bien, David D. "Religious Persecution in the French Enlightenment." *Church History* 30, no. 3 (1961): 325-33.

Blaisdell, Charmarie Jenkins. "Calvin's Letters to Women: The Courting of Ladies in High Places." *Sixteenth-Century Journal* 13, no. 3 (1982): 67-84.

Blaisdell, Charmarie Jenkins. "The Courting of Ladies in High Places." In *Calvin's Work in Geneva*, edited by Richard C. Gamble, 167-184. New York: Garland, 1992.

Blaisdell, Charmarie Jenkins. "The Matrix of Reform: Women in the Lutheran and Calvinist Movements." In *Triumph Over Silence: Women in Protestant History*, edited by Richard L. Greaves, 13-44. Westport, USA: Greenwood Press, 1985.

Blennerhassett, Charlotte Julia von Leyden, Lady. *Madame de Staël et son temps*. 2 vols. Paris: Louis Westhausser, 1890.

Blum, Carol. *Rousseau and the Republic of Virtue: The Language of Politics in the French Revolution*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986.

Blum, Carol. *Strength in Numbers: Population, Reproduction, and Power in Eighteenth-Century France*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002.

Boon, Sonja "Does a Dutiful Wife Write; or, Should Suzanne Get Divorced? Reflections on Suzanne Curchod Necker, Divorce, and the Construction of the Biographical Subject," *Lumen* XXVII (forthcoming).

Boon, Sonja. "Last Rites, Last Rights: Corporeal Abjection as Autobiographical Performance in Suzanne Curchod Necker's *Des inhumations précipitées* (1790)." *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* (forthcoming).

Boon, Sonja. "Performing the Woman of Sensibility: Suzanne Curchod Necker and the *Hospice de charité*." *Journal of Eighteenth-Century Studies* (forthcoming).

Bourdieu, Pierre, and Jean-Claude Passeron. *Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture*. Translated by Richard Nice. London, UK and Newbury Park, USA: Sage in association with Theory, Culture & Society, Dept. of Administrative and Social Studies, Teesside Polytechnic, 1990.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Translated by Richard Nice. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power*. Translated by Lauretta C. Clough. Oxford: Polity Press, 1996.

Bowers, Toni. *The Politics of Motherhood: British Writing and Culture, 1680-1760*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Bredin, Jean-Denis. *Une singulière famille: Jacques Necker, Suzanne Necker et Germaine de Staël*. Paris: Fayard, 1999.

Brouard-Arends, Isabelle. "Entre nature et histoire: dire la maternité au siècle des Lumières." In *Sexualité, mariage et famille au XVIIIe siècle*, Edited by Olga B. Cragg and Rosena Davison, 233-39. Montréal: Les presses de l'université Laval, 1998.

Brouard-Arends, Isabelle. *Vies et images maternelles dans la littérature du dix-huitième siècle*. Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation, 1991.

Burnand, Léonard. "L'image de Madame Necker dans les pamphlets." *Cahiers staëliens* 57 (2006): 237-54.

Butler, Judith. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 519-531.

Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* New York and London: Routledge, 1993.

Calvet, Jean. *Les Salons: de Marguerite de Navarre 1492-1549 à Suzanne Necker.* Cap-Saint-Ignace, Canada: La Plume d'Oie, 2000.

Camet, Sylvie. "La mort, spectacle parisien à la fin du XVIIIe siècle." In *Le Récit de la mort: écriture et histoire*, edited by Gérard Jacquin, 109-23. Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2003.

Carlson, Marvin. *Performance: A Critical Introduction.* London: Routledge, 1996.

Carpenter, Kirsty and Philip Mansel. *The French émigrés in Europe and the Struggle against Revolution, 1789-1814.* Houndmills, UK: MacMillan Press Ltd., 1999.

Carpenter, Kirsty. "London: Capital of the Emigration." In *The French émigrés in Europe and the Struggle against Revolution, 1789-1814*, edited by Kirsty Carpenter and Philip Mansel, 43-67. Houndmills, UK: MacMillan Press Ltd., 1999.

Causse, Etienne. *Madame Necker de Saussure et l'Education Progressive.* 2 vols. Paris: Editions "Je sers", 1930.

Chaunu, Pierre. *La mort à Paris XVIe, XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles.* Paris: Fayard, 1978.

Cixous, Hélène. *Stigmata.* Translated by Eric Prenowitz et al. London and New York: Routledge, 1998.

Cixous, Hélène. *The Day I Wasn't There.* Translated by Beverly Bie Brahic. Evanston, USA: Northwestern University Press, 2006.

Cixous, Hélène."Le rire de la méduse." *L'Arc* (1975): 39-54.

Clergue, Helen. *The Salon: A Study of French Society and Personalities in the Eighteenth Century.* New York: G.P. Putnam's & Sons, 1907.

Cody, Lisa Forman. *Birthing the Nation: Sex, Science, and the Conception of Eighteenth-Century Britain.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Constant, Paule. *Un monde à l'usage des demoiselles.* Paris: Gallimard, 1987.

Corbaz, André. *Madame Necker: Humble vaudoise et Grande dame.* Lausanne: Librairie Payot, 1945.

Coston, Adolphe de. *Histoire de Montélimar.* 4 vols. Montélimar : Bourron, 1886 .

Couser, G. Thomas. "Autopathography: Women, Illness, and Lifewriting." *a/b: Auto/biography Studies* 6, no. 1 (1991): 65-75.

Couser, G. Thomas. *Recovering Bodies: Illness, Disability, and Life Writing.* Madison, USA: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997.

Craveri, Benedetta. "Madame de La Ferté-Imbault (1715-1791) et son monde." *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* 105, no. 1 (2005): 95-110.

Craveri, Benedetta. *Madame du Deffand and her World.* Translated by Teresa Waugh. Boston: D.R. Godine, 1994.

Craveri, Benedetta. *The Age of Conversation*. Translated by Teresa Waugh. New York: New York Review of Books, 2005.

Darrow, Margaret H. "French Noblewomen and the New Domesticity." *Feminist Studies* 5, no.1 (1979): 41-65.

Davison, Rosena. "Time and Exile: The Case of Mme la Marquise de Lage de Volude." *Lumen* XVIII (1999): 69-82.

Dawson, Deidre. "Voltaire's Complaint: Illness and Eroticism in *La Correspondance*." *Literature and Medicine* 18, no. 1 (1999): 24-38.

Deschanel, Paul. *Figures des Femmes*. Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1889.

Diesbach, Ghislain de. *Madame de Staël*. Paris: Librairie académique Perrin, 1983.

Doyle, William. "Introduction." In *The French émigrés in Europe and the Struggle against Revolution, 1789-1814*, edited by Kirsty Carpenter and Philip Mansel, xv-xxii. Houndmills, UK: MacMillan Press Ltd., 1999.

Dubeau, Catherine. "L'Épreuve du salon ou le monde comme performance dans les *Mélanges* et les *Nouveaux Mélanges* de Suzanne Necker." *Cahiers Staëliens* 57 (2006): 201-26.

Dubeau, Catherine. "La lettre et la mère: roman familial et écriture de la passion chez Suzanne Necker (1737-1794) et Germaine de Staël (1766-1817)." PhD diss., Université Laval, 2007.

Ducommon, Marie-Jeanne and Dominique Quadroni. *Le Refuge Protestant dans le Pays de Vaud (Fin XVIIe–début XVIIIe siècle)*. Geneva: Droz, 1991.

Duden, Barbara. *Disembodying Women: Perspectives on Pregnancy and the Unborn*. Translated by Lee Hoinacki. Cambridge, USA and London, UK : Harvard University Press, 1993.

Duden, Barbara. *The Woman Beneath the Skin: A Doctor's Patients in Eighteenth Century Germany*. Translated by Thomas Dunlap. Cambridge, USA: Harvard University Press, 1991.

Duncan, Carol. "Happy Mothers and Other New Ideas in French Art." *Art Bulletin* 55 (1973): 570-83.

Duprat, Catherine. *"Pour l'amour de l'humanité": Le temps des philanthropes. La philanthropie parisienne des Lumières à la monarchie de Juillet*. 2 vols. Paris: Éditions du C.T.H.S., 1993.

Emberley, Peter. "Rousseau and the Domestication of Virtue." *Canadian Journal of Political Science/ Revue canadienne de science politique* XVII, no. 4 (1984): 731-53.

Emch-Dériaz, Antoinette. "Health and Gender Oriented Education: An Eighteenth-Century Case Study." *Women's Studies* 24 (1995): 521-30.

Emch-Dériaz, Antoinette. "L'enseignement clinique au XVIIIe siècle: l'exemple de Tissot." *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History/Bulletin canadien d'histoire de la médecine* 4 (1987): 145-64.

Emch-Dériaz, Antoinette. *Tissot, Physician of the Enlightenment*. New York: Peter Lang, 1992.

Fairchilds, Cissie. "Women and Family." In *French Women and the Age of Enlightenment*, edited by Samia I. Spencer, 97-110. Bloomington, USA: Indiana University Press, 1984.

Fairweather, Maria. *Madame de Staël*. London: Constable, 2005.

Faurey, J. *Madame Necker et la question du divorce*. Bordeaux: J. Bière, 1931.

Fermon, Nicole. *Domesticating Passions: Rousseau, Woman, and Nation*. Hanover, USA: Wesleyan University Press, 1997.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books, 1995.

Foucault, Michel. *The Birth of the Clinic*. Translated by A.M. Sheridan. London and New York: Routledge, 2003.

François, Alexis. "Correspondance de Jean-Jacques Rousseau et du médecin Tissot." *Annales de la société Jean-Jacques Rousseau* VII (1911): 19-40.

Gambier-Parry, Mark. *Madame Necker, her Family and her Friends*. Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1913.

Gervais, Raymond. *Histoire de l'Hôpital Necker, 1778-1885*. Paris: Imprimerie Parent, 1885.

Giddey, Ernest. "Suzanne Necker-Curchod et les lettres anglaises." *Revue historique vaudoise* (1981): 49-56;

Gillis, Christina Marsden. "'Seeing the Difference': An Interdisciplinary Approach to Death, Dying, Humanities, and Medicine." *Journal of Medical Humanities* 27 (2005): 105-15.

Goffman, Erving. *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Englewood Cliffs, USA: Prentice Hall, 1963.

Goffman, Erving. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Doubleday, 1959.

Goncourt, Edmond and Jules de. *Histoire de la société française pendant la révolution*. Paris: Didier, 1864.

Goncourt, Edmond and Jules de. *La femme au XVIIIe siècle*. Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1887.

Goodman, Dena. "Enlightenment Salons: The Convergence of Female and Philosophic Ambitions." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 22, no. 3 (1989): 329-50.

Goodman, Dena. "Filial Rebellion in the Salon: Madame Geoffrin and Her Daughter." *French Historical Studies* 16, no. 1 (1989): 28-47.

Goodman, Dena. "Germaine de Staël's Dilemmas: Writing, Gender, and Publicity." (unpublished paper).

Goodman, Dena. "Letter Writing and the Emergence of Gendered Subjectivity in Eighteenth-Century France." *Journal of Women's History* 17, no. 2 (2005): 9-37.

Goodman, Dena. "Julie de Lespinasse: A Mirror for the Enlightenment." In *Eighteenth-Century Women and the Arts*, edited by Frederick M. Keener and Susan E. Lorsch, 3-10. New York: Greenwood Press, Inc., 1988.

Goodman, Dena. "Le Spectateur intérieur: les journaux de Suzanne Necker." *Littérales* 17 (1995): 91-100.

Goodman, Dena. "Pigalle's *Voltaire nu*: The Republic of Letters Represents Itself to the World." *Representations* 16 (1986): 86-109.

Goodman, Dena. "Policing Society: Women as Political Actors in the Enlightenment Discourse." In *Conceptualising Women in Enlightenment Thought/Conceptualiser la femme dans la pensée des Lumières*, edited by Hans Erich Bödeker and Lieselotte Steinbrügge, 129-41. Berlin: Berlin Verlag Arno Spitz GmbH, 2001.

Goodman, Dena. "Public Sphere and Private Life: Toward a Synthesis of Current Historiographical Approaches to the Old Regime." *History and Theory* 31, no. 1 (1992): 1-20.

Goodman, Dena. "Suzanne Necker's *Mélanges* : Gender, Writing, and Publicity." In *Going Public: Women and Publishing in Early Modern France*, edited by Elizabeth C. Goldsmith and Dena Goodman, 211-23. Ithaca, USA and London, UK: Cornell University Press, 1995.

Goodman, Dena. *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment.* Ithaca, New York, and London: Cornell University Press, 1994.

Goring, Paul. *The Rhetoric of Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century Culture.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Grange, Henri. *Les idées de Necker.* Paris: C. Klincksieck, 1974.

Greaves, Richard L., ed. *Triumph Over Silence: Women in Protestant History.* Westport, USA: Greenwood Press, 1985.

Greenbaum, Louis S. "Jacques Necker and the Reform of the Paris Hospitals Before the French Revolution." *Eighteenth-Century Life* IX, no. 1 (1984): 1-15.

Guillaumin, Colette. "Race et nature: système de marques, idée de groupe naturel et rapports sociaux." *Pluriel-Débats* 11 (1977): 39-55.

Gutwirth, Madelyn. "Suzanne Necker's Legacy: Breastfeeding as Metonym in Germaine de Staël's Delphine." *Eighteenth-Century Life* 18, no. 2 (2004): 17-40.

Gutwirth, Madelyn. *Madame de Staël, novelist: The Emergence of the Artist as Woman.* Urbana, USA: University of Illinois Press, 1978.

Habermas, Jürgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society.* Translated by Thomas Burger. Cambridge, USA: MIT Press, 1991.

Hageman, Jeanne. "Rewriting Rousseau: Madame de Saint-Chamond's Jean-Jacques à Mr. S..." special issue, *Women in French Studies* (2003): 112-21.

Hannin, Valérie. "La fondation de l'hospice de charité: une expérience médicale au temps du rationalisme expérimental." *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 31, no. 1 (1984): 116-130.

Hannin, Valérie. "Une ambition de femme au siècle des Lumières: Le cas de Madame Necker." *Cahiers staëliens* 36 (1985): 5-19.

Haussonville, Othenin d', "Un projet de lettre de Mme Necker à Louis XVI." *Cahiers staëliens* 20 (1976): 3-8.

Haussonville, Paul-Gabriel d'. *Le salon de Madame Necker, d'après des documents tirés des Archives de Coppet*. 2 vols. Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1882.

Haussonville, Paul-Gabriel d'. *Madame de Staël et M. Necker d'après leur correspondence inédite*. Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1925.

Hilton, Wendy. *Dance of court & theater: the French noble style, 1690-1725*. Edited by Caroline Gaynor. Princeton, USA: Princeton Book Co., 1981.

Huet, Marie-Hélène. *Monstrous Imagination*. Cambridge, USA: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Irigaray, Luce. "The Bodily Encounter with the Mother." In *The Irigaray Reader*, edited by Margaret Whitford, translated by David Macey, 34-46. Oxford, UK and Cambridge, USA: Basil Blackwell, 1991.

Irigaray, Luce. *Speculum of the Other Woman*. Translated by Gillian C. Gill. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.

Irigaray, Luce. *This Sex Which Is Not One*. Translated by Catherine Porter. Ithaca, USA: Cornell University Press, 1985.

Jacobus, Mary. "Incorruptible Milk: Breast-feeding and the French Revolution." In *Rebel Daughters: Women and the French Revolution*, edited by Sara E. Melzer and Leslie W. Rabine, 54-75. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Jacques René Cotinat, *La Fondation et les débuts de l'hôpital Necker à Paris*. PhD diss., Académie de Paris Université René Descartes, 1972.

Johnson-Cousin, Danielle. "Le théâtre de Necker. A propos d'inédits des Archives de Coppet." *Revue de la société d'histoire du théâtre* 32, no. 3 (1980): 220-31.

Jordanova, Ludmilla. *Nature Displayed: Gender, Science and Medicine, 1760-1820* London, UK and New York, USA: Addison Wesley Longman Limited, 1999.

Kale, Steven D. "Women, Salons, and the State in the Aftermath of the French Revolution." *Journal of Women's History* 13, no. 4 (2002): 54-80.

Kale, Steven D. "Women, the Public Sphere, and the Persistence of Salons." *French Historical Studies* 25, no. 1 (2002): 115-48.

Kale, Steven. *French Salons: High Society and Political Sociability from the Old Regime to the Revolution of 1848*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004.

Klauber, Martin I. *Between Reformed Scholasticism and Pan-Protestantism: Jean-Alphonse Turretin (1671-1737) and Enlightened Orthodoxy at the Academy of Geneva*. Selinsgrove, USA: Susquehanna University Press, 1994.

Kohler, Pierre. *Madame de Staël et la Suisse*. Lausane: Payot, 1916.

Kors, Alan Charles. *D'Holbach's Coterie: An Enlightenment in Paris*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976.

Kristeva, Julia. "Motherhood [according to Giovanni Bellini]." In *French Feminism Reader*, edited by Kelly Oliver, 176-80. Lanham, USA and Oxford, UK: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000.

Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Translated by Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.

Lacan, Jacques. "The Mirror Stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience." In *Écrits: A Selection*, translated by Alan Sheridan, 1-8. London: Routledge, 2001.

Lairtullier, E. *Les femmes célèbres de 1789 à 1795, et leur excellence dans la révolution*, 2 vols. Paris: Chez France, à la librairie politique, 1840.

Lally-Tollendal, Trophime-Gérard, marquis de "Necker Susanne Curchod de Nasse." In *Biographie Universelle*, edited by Louis-Gabriel Michaud, 45 vols., 30:274-75. Paris: Madame C. Desplaces; Leipzig: Librairie de F.A. Brockhaus, 1843-18–.

Landes, Joan B. *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988.

Lane, Belden C. "Spirituality as the Performance of Desire: Calvin on the World as a Theatre of God's Glory." *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 1, no. 1 (2001): 1-30.

Laqueur, Thomas. *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*. Cambridge, USA and London, UK: Harvard University Press, 1990.

Lejeune, Philippe *On Autobiography*. Edited by Paul John Eakin. Translated by Katherine Leary. Minneapolis, USA: University of Minnesota Press, 1989 .

Lilti, Antoine. "Mondanité et politique: le salon Necker." *Cahiers staëliens* 57 (2006): 185-200.

Lilti, Antoine. *Le monde des salons: Sociabilité et mondanité à Paris au XVIIIe siècle*. Paris: Fayard, 2005.

Linton, Marisa. "Virtue Rewarded? Women and the politics of virtue in 18th-century France. Part I" *History of European Ideas* 26 (2000): 35-49.

Linton, Marisa. "Virtue Rewarded? Women and the politics of virtue in 18th-century France. Part II" *History of European Ideas* 27 (2001): 51-65.

MacArthur, Elizabeth. "Between the Republic of Virtue and the Republic of Letters: Marie-Jeanne Roland Practices Rousseau." *Yale French Studies* 92 (1997): 184-203.

Masseau, Didier. "La Marquise de La Ferté-Imbault: reine antiphilosophe des Lanturelus." In *Les dérèglements de l'art: Formes et procédures de l'illégitimité culturelle en France : 1715-1914*, edited by Pierre Popovic and Erik Vigneault, 35-50. Montréal: Les presses de l'université de Montréal, 2001.

McKay, Sherry. "The 'Salon de la Princesse': 'Rococo' Design, Ornamented Bodies and the Public Sphere." *Revue d'art canadienne/Canadian Art Review* XXI, no. 1-2 (1994): 71-84.

Mentzer, Raymond A. "Morals and Moral Regulation in Protestant France." *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* XXXII, no. 1 (2000): 1-20.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Basic Writings*, Edited by Thomas Baldwin. London: Routledge, 2004.

Miller, Naomi J. and Naomi Yavneh, eds. *Maternal Measures: Figuring caregiving in the early modern period*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2000.

Monter, E. William. "Women in Calvinist Geneva (1550-1800)." *Signs* 6, no. 2 (1980): 189-209.

Monter, William. "Protestant Wives, Catholic Saints, and the Devil's Handmaid: Women in the Age of Reformations." In *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, edited by Renate Bridenthal, Claudia Koonz, and Susan Stuard, 203-19. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987.

Montet, Albert de. *Dictionnaire biographique des genevois et des vaudois*. 2 vols. Lausanne: Georges Bridel, 1878.

Mours, Samuel. *Essai sommaire de géographie du protestantisme réformé français au XVIIIe siècle*. Paris: Librairie protestante, 1966.

Munro, James S. *Mademoiselle de Scudéry and the Carte de tendre*. Durham, UK: University of Durham, 1986.

Murphy, Terence D. "The French Medical Profession's Perception of Its Social Function between 1776 and 1830." *Journal of Medical History* 23 (1979): 259-78.

Ohayon, Ruth. "Rousseau's Julie; or, The Maternal Odyssey." *CLA Journal* 30, no. 1 (1986): 69-82.

Panges, Comtesse Jean de. "Necker en Angleterre: Le mystérieux voyage de 1776." *La Revue des Deux Mondes* (1948): 480-99.

Pardailhé-Galabrun, Annik. *The Birth of Intimacy: Privacy and Domestic Life in Early Modern Paris*. Translated by Jocelyn Phelps. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1991.

Pascal, Jean-Noel. "La Muse de l'*Encyclopédie*: Julie de Lespinasse." In *Femmes savantes et femmes d'esprit: Women Intellectuals of the French Eighteenth*

Century, edited by Roland Bonnel and Catherine Rubinger, 243-65 New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1994.

Pekacz, Jolanta T. "Gender as Political Orientation: Parisian *Salonnières* and the Querelle des Bouffons." *Canadian Journal of History/Annales canadiennes d'histoire* XXXII (1997): 405-14.

Pekacz, Jolanta T. "Salon Women and the Quarrels about Opera in Eighteenth-Century Paris." *The European Legacy: Towards New Paradigms* 1, no. 4 (1996): 1608-14.

Pekacz, Jolanta T. "The French Salon of the Old Regime as a Spectacle." *Lumen* XXII (2001): 83-102.

Pekacz, Jolanta T. "The *Salonnières* and the Philosophes in Old Regime France: The Authority of Aesthetic Judgement." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 60, no. 2 (1999): 277-97.

Pekacz, Jolanta T. *Conservative Tradition in Pre-Revolutionary France: Parisian Salon Women*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1999.

Pérol, Lucette. "Diderot, Mme Necker et la réforme des hôpitaux." *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 311 (1993): 219-33.

Peter, Jean-Pierre. "Entre femmes et medecins. Violence et singularités dans les discours du corps et sur le corps d'après les manuscrits médicaux de la fin du XVIIIe siècle." *Ethnologie française* VI, no. 3-4 (1976): 341-48.

Photiadès, Constantin. *La reine des Lanturelus: Marie-Thérèse Geoffrin, Marquise de la Ferté-Imbault, 1715-1791*. Paris: Plon, 1928.

Pilloud, Séverine "Mettre les maux en mots, médiations dans la consultation épistolaire au XVIIIe siècle: les malades du Dr. Tissot (1728-1797)." *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History/Bulletin canadien d'histoire de la médecine* 16 (1999): 215-45.

Pilloud, Séverine and Micheline Louis-Courvoisier. "The Intimate Experience of the Body in the Eighteenth Century: Between Interiority and Exteriority." *Journal of Medical History* 47 (2003): 451-72.

Pilloud, Séverine. "Tourisme médical à Lausanne dans la seconde moitié du XVIIIe siècle." *Revue historique vaudoise* 114 (2006): 9-23.

Pitassi, Maria-Cristina. *De l'Orthodoxie aux Lumières: Genève 1670-1737*. Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1992.

Poisvert, M. "Les débuts de l'hôpital Necker." *Histoire des sciences médicales* 7 (1973): 315-26.

Popiel, Jennifer J. "Making Mothers: The Advice Genre and the Domestic Ideal, 1760-1830." *Journal of Family History* 29, no. 4 (2004): 339-50.

Potter, Mary. "Gender Equality and Gender Hierarchy in Calvin's Theology." *Signs* 11, no. 4 (1986): 725-39.

Radeff, Anne. "Identité et différence: L'intégration des Huguenots à Lausanne (1698-1798)." *Revue suisse d'histoire* 1986, no. 3 (1986): 337-45.

Ramsey, Matthew. *Professional and Popular Medicine in France, 1770-1830.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Raoul, Valerie et al, eds. *Unfitting Stories: Narrative Approaches to Disease, Disability, and Trauma*. Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2007.

Read, General John Meredith. *Historic Studies in Vaud, Berne, and Savoy.* 2 vols. London: Chatto & Windus, 1897.

Renevey-Fry, Chantal et al, eds. *En attendant le prince charmant. L'éducation des jeunes filles à Genève, 1740-1970.* Geneva: Service de la recherche en éducation et Musée d'ethnographie, 1997.

Rieder, Philip and Vincent Barras. "Écrire sa maladie au siècle des Lumières." In *La médecine des Lumières: tout autour de Tissot*, edited by Vincent Barras and Micheline Louis-Courvoisier, 201-222. Geneva and Paris: Georg Editeur, 2001.

Ritter, Eugene. *Notes sur Madame de Staël.* Geneva: H. Georg, 1899.

Robinson, J.H., ed. "Revocation of the Edict of Nantes (October 22, 1685)," in *Readings in European History*, 2 vols., 2:287-91. Boston: Ginn, 1906.

Roelker, Nancy L. "The Appeal of Calvinism to French Noblewomen in the Sixteenth Century." Journal of Interdisciplinary History 2, no. 4 (1972): 391-418.

Roelker, Nancy L. "The Role of Noblewomen in the French Reformation." *Archive for Reformation History* 63 (1972): 168-95.

Rosenblatt, Helena. "On the 'Misogyny' of Jean-Jacques Rousseau: The *Letter to d'Alembert* in Historical Context." *French Historical Studies* Vol. 25, no. 1 (2002): 91-114.

Rosenblatt, Helena. *Rousseau and Geneva: From the First Discourse to the Social Contract, 1749-1762.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Royde-Smith, Naomi Gwladys. *The Double Heart: A Study of Julie de Lespinasse.* London: Hamish Hamilton, 1931.

Ruymsbeke, Bertrand Van. "Minority Survival: The Huguenot Paradigm in France and the Diaspora." In *Memory and Identity: The Huguenots in France and the Atlantic Diaspora*, edited by Bertrand Van Ruymsbeke and Randy J. Sparks, 1-25. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003.

Sainte-Beuve, Charles Augustin. *Causeries du lundi.* 15 vols. Paris: Garnier, 1851-62.

Schiebinger, Londa L. *The Mind Has No Sex? Women in the Origins of Modern Science.* Cambridge, USA and London, UK: Harvard University Press, 1989.

Schiebinger, Londa. "Skeletons in the Closet: The First Illustrations of the Female Skeleton in Eighteenth-Century Anatomy," *Representations* 14 (Spring, 1986): 42-82.

Ségur, Pierre Marie Maurice Henri de. *Le royaume de la rue Saint-Honoré: Madame Geoffrin et sa fille*. Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1897.

Ségur, Pierre Marie Maurice Henri, Comte de. *Julie de Lespinasse*. Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1905.

Senior, Nancy. "Aspects of Infant Feeding in Eighteenth-Century France." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 16, no. 4 (1983): 367-88.

Seth, Catriona. "Madame Necker: Une vie au service des autres." *Cahiers staëliens* 57 (2006): 173-183.

Sévery, M. et Mme William de. *La vie de société dans le Pays de Vaud à la fin du dix-huitième siècle*. 2 vols. Lausanne: Georges Bridel & Cie; Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1911.

Simon-Mazoyer, Solange. "Le conflit entre les excès de la mode et de la santé au XVIIIe siècle: l' 'habillage' du visage." In *La médecine des Lumières: tout autour de Tissot*, edited by Vincent Barras and Micheline Louis-Courvoisier, 41-54. Geneva and Paris: Georg Editeur, 2001.

Sonnet, Martine. *L'Education des filles au temps des Lumières*. Paris: Le Cerf, 1987.

Sosnowski,Thomas C. "French Émigrés in the United States." In *The French émigrés in Europe and the Struggle against Revolution, 1789-1814*, edited by Kirsty Carpenter and Philip Mansel, 139-50. Houndmills , UK: MacMillan Press Ltd., 1999.

Soumoy-Thibert, Geneviève. "Les idées de Madame Necker." *Dix-Huitième Siècle* 21 (1989): 357-68.

Spencer, Samia I., ed. *French Women and the Age of Enlightenment*. Bloomington, USA: Indiana University Press, 1984.

Stanton, Domna C. *The Aristocrat as Art: A Study of the Honnête Homme and the Dandy in Seventeenth and Nineteenth-Century French Literature*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1980.

Steinberger, Deborah. "The Difficult Birth of the Good Mother: Donneau de Vise's *L'Embarras de Godard, ou l'Accouchee*." In *Maternal Measures: Figuring Caregiving in the Early Modern Period*. Edited by Naomi J. Miller and Naomi Yavneh, 201-11. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2000.

Steinbrügge, Lieselotte. *The Moral Sex: Woman's Nature in the French Enlightenment*, Translated by Pamela E. Selwyn. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Steinmetz, David C. *Calvin in Context*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Striff, Erin, ed. *Performance Studies*. Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

Sturzer, Felicia B. "Love and disease: the contaminated letters of Julie de Lespinasse." *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 2000, no. 8 (2000): 3-16.

Tallentyre, S.G. *The Women of the Salons and Other French Portraits.* London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1901 .

The Oxford English Dictionary. 2nd ed. 1989. *OED Online*. Oxford University Press. http://dictionary.oed.com.proxy.lib.sfu.ca/.

Thompson, John Lee. *John Calvin and the Daughters of Sarah*. Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1992.

Tracy, James D. *Europe's Reformations, 1450-1650: Doctrine, Politics, and Community*. 2nd ed. Lanham, USA: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006.

Trouille, Mary Seidman. *Sexual Politics in the Enlightenment: Women Writers Read Rousseau.* Albany, USA: State University of New York Press, 1997.

Trouille, Mary. "The Failings of Rousseau's Ideals of Domesticity and Sensibility." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 24, no. 4 (1991): 451-83.

Vadier, Berthe. "La mère de Mme de Staël et sa parenté au pays de Vaud." *Etrennes helvétiques* (1901): 287-324.

Varnault , A.V. et al. *Biographie Nouvelle des Contemporains, ou Dictionnaire historique et raisonné de tous les hommes qui, depuis la Révolution française, ont acquis de la célébrité par leurs actions, leurs écrits, leurs erreurs our leurs crimes, soit en France, soit dans les pays étrangers.* 20 vols. Paris: Librairie historique, 1820-1825.

Vecchi, Paola. "De la mort à la vie: La taphophobie et l'au-delà au XVIIIe siècle (Jean-Jacques Bruhier et Suzanne Curchod Necker)." In *Transhumances culturelles: Mélanges*, edited by Corrado Rosso, 119-30. Pisa: Editrice Libreria Goliardica, 1985.

Vess, David M. *Medical Revolution in France, 1789-1796*. Gainesville, USA: Florida State University Press, 1975.

Vila, Anne C. "Beyond Sympathy: Vapors, Melancholia, and the Pathologies of Sensibility in Tissot and Rousseau." *Yale French Studies* 92 (1997): 88-101.

Vila, Anne C. "Reading the 'Sensible' Body: Medicine, Philosophy, and Semiotics in Eighteenth-Century France." In *Data Made Flesh: Embodying Information*, edited by Robert Mitchell and Phillip Thurtle, 27-45. New York, USA: Routledge, 2004.

Vila, Anne C. "Sex and Sensibility: Pierre Roussel's *Système physique et moral de la femme*." *Representations*, 52 (1995): 76-93.

Vila, Anne C. *Enlightenment and Pathology: Sensibility in the Literature and Medicine of Eighteenth-Century France.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.

Walker, Lesley H. "When Girls Read Rousseau: The Case of Madame Roland." *Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 43, no. 2 (2002): 115-36.

Watt, Jeffrey R. "Calvin on Suicide." *Church History* 66, no. 3 (1997): 463-76.

Watt, Jeffrey R. "Women and the Consistory in Calvin's Geneva." *Sixteenth Century Journal* XXIV, no. 2 (1993): 429-439.

Watt, Jeffrey R. *Choosing Death: Suicide and Calvinism in Early Modern Geneva*. Kirksville, USA: Truman State University Press, 2001.

Weiner, Dora B. *The Citizen-Patient in Revolutionary and Imperial Paris*. Baltimore, USA: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993.

Wellman, Kathleen. "Physicians and Philosophes: Physiology and Sexual Morality in the French Enlightenment." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 35, no. 2 (2002): 267-77.

Wengler, Elisabeth M. "Women, Religion, and Reform in Sixteenth-Century Geneva." PhD diss., Boston College, 1999.

Whatley, Janet. "Dissoluble Marriage, Paradise Lost: Suzanne Necker's *Réflexions sur le divorce*." *Dalhousie French Studies* 56 (2001): 144-53.

Williams, Elizabeth A. "Hysteria and the Court Physician in Enlightenment France." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 35, no. 2 (2002): 247-55.

Williams, Elizabeth A. "Medicine in the Civic Life of Eighteenth-Century Montpellier." *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 70, no. 2 (1996): 205-32.

Williams, Elizabeth A. *A Cultural History of Medical Vitalism in Enlightenment Montpellier*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2003.

Williams, Elizabeth A. *The Physical and the Moral: Anthropology, Physiology, and Philosophical Medicine in France, 1750-1850*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Winslow, Jacques-Bénigne. *Dissertation sur l'incertitude des signes de la mort*. Translated by Jacques-Jean Bruhier. Paris: Morel, 1742.

Winston, Michael E. "Medicine, Marriage, and Human Degeneration in the French Enlightenment." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 38, no. 2 (2005): 263-81.

Winston, Michael E. *From Perfectibility to Perversion: Meliorism in Eighteenth-Century France*. New York: Peter Lang, 2005.

Witte, John, Jr. and Robert M. Kingdon. *Sex, Marriage, and Family in John Calvin's Geneva, Volume 1: Courtship, Engagement, and Marriage*. Grand Rapids, USA and Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005.