

**TOWARD A HISTORY OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL THOUGHT, 1400-1800  
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**CONFERENCE ABSTRACTS**

(in alphabetical order)

**ARIANE BERGERON-FOOTE\***

**L'ECOLE PRATIQUE DES HAUTES ÉTUDES (EPHE)**

**'Solace in Troubled Times: Catherine d'Amboise as Reader of Boethius'**

This paper will concentrate on the prose writings of Catherine d'Amboise (1481–1550), namely her *Livre des prudens et imprudens* (1509) and the *Complainte de la dame pasmée contre Fortune* (after 1525), two didactic prose treatises largely ignored by literary history, composed in the Château de Lignières in the Berry region. Both treatises are illustrated by quite an impressive cycle of illuminated miniatures.

In these texts, I should like to address the importance of classical sources such as Boethius but also Cicero, Virgil and Seneca as well as the significance of the cardinal virtue Prudence. It is important to emphasize the highly personal tone of Catherine d'Amboise's writings: the author reveals quite a few key autobiographical details that allow the reader to better understand the author's purpose and use of writing as a form of literary catharsis, or consolation from her worldly miseries and deceptions. Posthumous daughter of Charles I d'Amboise and Catherine de Chauvigny, Catherine belonged to the large and munificent d'Amboise family, close to royal circles of power, second only in importance to the king of France in the early years of the sixteenth century. Catherine's uncle was Georges d'Amboise, cardinal-bishop of Rouen and minister to the king Louis XII but also patron of the arts and avid book-collector. Her father, Charles Ier, her brother, Charles II Chaumont d'Amboise and her nephew, Georges d'Amboise all took an active part in the Italian Wars that sought to assert French claims in Italy.

Although the structure of the *Livre des prudens et imprudens* owes much to the great didactic and historical compilations, in particular Boccaccio and the *De casibus virorum illustrium*, the vivid dialogues with her characters carefully selected from sacred, secular or mythological history, as well as numerous iconographical details, reveal the influence of Boethius and his *Consolatio philosophiae*, likely read in the French vernacular. Her opening dialogue with Lady Prudence harks back to the dialogue between Philosophy and Boethius but the author has chosen to substitute the allegorical figure of Philosophy with that of Prudence, in

reference to another famous female figure, none other than Jeanne de France, repudiated wife of Louis XII and founder of the Franciscan female order of the *Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, dedicated to the Ten Evangelical Virtues of the Virgin Mary, the first of which was Prudence. The final epilogue, illustrated by its imposing miniature, is dedicated to the author of the *Consolatio*: Catherine appears as Lady Philosophy and proudly addresses the learned and much admired «*noble candelabre et lucerne rutilante noumé Boece Avice Manilhe dit de Consolation*».

The sudden retreat of the d'Amboise family from their previous centrality in French politics seems to have triggered the composition of Catherine's second prose work. Her *Complainte de la dame pasmee contre Fortune* is an autobiographical allegory in which sad news causes the narrator-actor to collapse and engage in an active dialogue with Reason against Fortune's inconstancy, pursuing a mystical journey towards Patience who offers the pilgrims solace and ends with an allegorized version of the Socratic precept "Know thyself": *Connaissance de soi-même* leads to *Connaissance de Dieu*, both Boethian themes. Although anonymous, authorship is confirmed by autobiographical details as well as clear heraldic evidence. Henri Omont rightly suggested that this work owed much to Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* but we shall also point out her knowledge and use of Seneca, in particular his *De clementia*, as well as certain evangelical and mystical overtones.

\* Ariane Bergeron-Foote is unfortunately not able to attend the conference. However, copies of her paper will be made available.

**JACQUELINE BROAD**

**MONASH UNIVERSITY**

**'Liberty and the Right of Resistance: Women's Political Writings of the English Civil War Era'**

In the third volume of her *History of England* (1767), Catharine Macaulay observes that a group of 'gentlewomen, tradesmens' wives, & c', presented a petition to the House of Commons in February 1642. These women petitioners were strongly influenced by the radical ideas of the Leveller movement, a group that has been described as 'the first democratic political movement in modern history'. In a number of petitions from 1642 to 1653, women defend the Leveller ideals of the spiritual and political equality of subjects, the toleration of non-conformist religion, and the individual's freedom of conscience. A handful of women also published pamphlets of a political nature under their own names: Katherine Chidley (*fl.* 1641-53), the mother of Samuel

Chidley (a treasurer of the Leveller party), published three justifications for the toleration of separatist religion in England; and Elizabeth Poole (*fl.* 1649), a visionary or ‘prophetess’, wrote three works of advice to the General Council of the New Model Army concerning the trial and execution of Charles I.

It is only fitting that Macaulay should show an interest in these early radical or ‘dissenting’ women. In the past, scholars have claimed that the civil war women might be seen as natural predecessors to Macaulay and her republican contemporary, Mary Wollstonecraft. Recent commentators take the comparison a step further: they claim that the early and later radical women both make a significant connection between a subject’s right to resist rulers, on the one hand, and a woman’s right to resist her husband, on the other. In this respect, it is argued, the civil war women make an early and significant contribution to liberalism and liberal feminist theory.

In this paper, I examine the key political themes in women’s writings of the English civil war era, with particular emphasis on the transition in their arguments from the spiritual freedom and equality of souls to the political freedom and equality of subjects; as well as their justifications of the right to resist unjust authority at both the family and state level. But I take a critical attitude toward claims about the significance of these women’s writings for the history of liberalism or liberalist feminism. I aim to demonstrate that these women do not develop a fully-fledged theory of women’s rights, and nor do they develop a thorough-going critique of the marriage/social contract analogue. My analysis focuses on the writings of Chidley and Poole, in particular. In their writings about female liberty and equality, and the duties of wives to husbands, I argue, these women occupy a surprisingly conservative political position.

**KAREN GREEN**

**MONASH UNIVERSITY**

**‘Phronesis Feminized; Prudence from Christine de Pizan to Elizabeth I’**

In this paper I examine the virtue of prudence both from the point of view of the content of the virtue and from the point of view of its iconographical representation during the period of 1400-1600 in France and England.

The first section of the paper outlines the concept of prudence found in Christine’s political works and demonstrates its roots in Aristotle’s *phronesis*. Prudence in this sense is the central political virtue and requirement of good princely rule. This section of the paper also explores fifteenth century images of prudence, both in manuscripts containing Christine’s

works, and in fifteenth century illuminated manuscripts of Aristotle's *Ethics*, in which work the nature of *phronesis* is given its fullest exposition.

The second section of the paper explores the exploitation of images of a feminized prudence in works from late fifteenth century France, in particular those associated with Louise of Savoy.

The final section of the paper juxtaposes these fifteenth century images against the series of sieve portraits of Elizabeth I and argues, against the famous and widely accepted hypothesis of Frances Yates that the sieve in these portraits represents Elizabeth I's virginity, that in fact in these portraits Elizabeth is being represented as political prudence. In particular, I argue that reading the images in the Sienna version of the sieve portrait in the light of Christine's works results in a much more coherent reading of the painting than Yates' attempt to connect the portrait with Petrarch's *Triumph of Chastity*.

**SARAH HUTTON**

**MIDDLESEX UNIVERSITY**

**'Liberty, Equality And Virtue: Theology, Ethics and the Enlightenment Feminism of Elizabeth Carter and Catherine Macaulay'**

My paper will discuss political applications of theological discourse by women who argued for equality, education and the expansion of female agency in the century prior to the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792).

Since, prior to Wollstonecraft, women do not use the terminology of rights, it is easy to overlook continuities between Wollstonecraft and earlier politically-conscious women. This perceivable discontinuity is accentuated by the contrast between the apparent secularism of Wollstonecraft's case, on the one hand, and the religious ring of the texts produced by earlier women — titles such as Astell's *Letters Concerning the Love of God*, or Damaris Masham's *Occasional Thoughts in Reference to a Virtuous or Christian Life*. However, as I shall argue, it is precisely theology that provides a link between women thinkers of the English Enlightenment and Mary Wollstonecraft. This is not simply on account of the fact that Wollstonecraft's own religious views are now being acknowledged. But, more significantly, all these women give prominence to moral arguments when making their case for equality and educational opportunity for women. And these moral arguments are founded in a shared set of theological presuppositions, particularly their conception of God. This holds true for women on either side of the party-political divide, irrespective of their religious conformity or non-conformity. After sketching a broad overview of the theologically-based ethics among politically conscious

women from Mary Astell, to Mary Wollstonecraft, my paper will focus Elizabeth Carter and Catherine Macaulay. Although they belong to different parts of the political spectrum, and there are differences in the degree scope of their feminism, both Carter and Macaulay have common feminist aims, which, in each case is linked to her theological ethics founded in divine benevolence. My paper will discuss ways in which the theology of each underpins her feminism and colours her political outlook.

**CAROLYN JAMES**

**MONASH UNIVERSITY**

**“Machiavelli in a Skirt”. Political discourse in the correspondence of Isabella d’Este’**

While female protagonists dominate the most successful vernacular literary texts of the early sixteenth century, *Il Cortigiano* and the *Orlando Furioso*, both of which assume a female as well as a male audience, women are almost entirely absent from the similarly famous works of history and political analysis that emerged from republican Florence at precisely this time. Niccolò Machiavelli and Francesco Guicciardini wrote about and addressed men in their revolutionary texts about politics, although Guicciardini admitted in his family memoir that one of his female relatives could talk as astutely about politics as any man. Florence was, as Nadia Cannata Salamone concludes in a recent volume on women in Renaissance culture and society, “a conspicuous centre of silence for women’s voices”. Even those elite women such as Lucrezia Tornabuoni, mother of Lorenzo de’ Medici, who ventured onto the literary scene by writing sacred works, did so without the sophisticated training of their male counterparts and were even, in a technical sense, semi-literate in that they wielded a pen with difficulty.

It is in the courtly context, then, where the literary texts, mentioned above, represent women as visible, intelligent and articulate, that we must look for evidence of female voices; Italy produced no Christine de Pizan, although Kate Lowe has very recently drawn our attention to the conventual historians active on the peninsular from the sixteenth century onwards. . Even in the courts, women’s desire to move beyond the restrictive confines of contemporary gender norms must be inferred from their positive response to, and direct encouragement of, literary propaganda by male humanists who questioned long-entrenched assumptions about female inferiority. The Defence of Women genre, inspired by Boccaccio’s mid-fourteenth century foundation text, *De mulieribus claris*, is particularly associated in its Italian tradition with the courts of Ferrara, Mantua and Urbino and with the indirect sponsorship of powerful women such as Eleonora d’Aragona, and her daughter Isabella d’Este. In the public realm women preferred to keep a discreet distance from the literary apologies which justified their political

role and defended their contribution to contemporary culture. In private, however, it was a different matter. The archival letter collections of the Italian courts contain an abundance of writing by women. This paper will analyse the letters of Isabella d'Este, over 12,000 of which survive, and suggest that this source constitutes a new and little-used text that allows the recovery, not only of a woman's important political role but of her response to, and reflections on, the turbulent political scene of the early sixteenth century. While she may not have been the Renaissance virago suggested by a nineteenth century scholar's enthusiastic characterization of her as 'Machiavelli in a skirt', Isabella d'Este's trenchant and realistic approach to the analysis of contemporary politics has much in common with the famous Florentine theorists of her time.

**CARRIE F. KLAUS**

**DEPAUW UNIVERSITY**

**'Keeping Ahead of the English? A Defense of Jews by a Transnational Baroness in Revolutionary France'**

"Frenchmen!" urged Cornélie Wouters heroically in 1790, "Let this example be engraved upon your memory, just as the august names of your sage Legislators will be engraved in ineffaceable letters upon the temples of Justice, Nature & Humanity once they have illustrated the regeneration of France with the Decree that Jews await as the end of their troubles & the bestowal of their rights as citizens, to which they lay claim by virtue of being human."

One of numerous defenses of Jews in the first years of the French Revolution, Wouters' *Mémoire à l'Assemblée Nationale* is noteworthy in its Paris-based author's marked identification of herself as a foreigner—she signs the text "The Baroness of Vasse, English Woman"—and in her use of her role as an outsider to play upon her French audience's sense of patriotism. Born in Brussels, married to a German, and rewarded for her work by the king of Sweden, Cornélie Wouters, Baroness of Vasse, was known in Paris as "an English lady" even though she published only in French. Best known for a few short works of original fiction and for translations of English fiction, drama, and history, Wouters seized the revolutionary moment to craft a decidedly more political text: an address to the Assemblée Nationale arguing that Jews should be recognized as full citizens of the new Republic. (The Assemblée Nationale voted to extend the rights of citizenship to Jews on September 27, 1791.)

Wouters kept a close eye on both French and English politics throughout her career, commenting frequently on differences between the "character" of the two nations, composing an allegory of the American Revolution (*Le Nouveau Continent*, 1783), and exploring the monarchy in its various forms in her fiction. Nowhere, however, are her political comments

more direct than in her 1790 statement to the Assemblée Nationale. After a brief mention of gender (“Although I am a woman, I dare to join those who have spoken in favor of Jews. When pleading the cause of justice, there is no distinction of rank or sex.”), Wouters pulls out all the rhetorical stops in her appeal to the Assemblée’s national pride, calling it “the Tribunal of the most enlightened Nation on earth”, warning that allowing the English to recognize Jews first will cost France a greater loss of wealth than the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, and hinting at “three Jewish families who wait for nothing but the Decree of the august Senate to leave England.”

In exile from France just three years later, Wouters published a three-act play, *La Famille Émigrée*, in which she expressed a deep disenchantment with the Revolution. In 1790, though, when great things still seemed possible, she drafted a bold challenge to the Assemblée Nationale to make good on its promises of equality for all.

**TSAE LAN LEE DOW**

**MONASH UNIVERSITY**

**‘Heavenly Bodies: Engaging Male Authority in the Works of Christine de Pizan and Mary Wollstonecraft’**

There is tendency among scholars to treat the political writings of both Christine de Pizan and Mary Wollstonecraft only in the context of their immediate political environments, without due reference to the general trends in the broader sociocultural frameworks within which each respectively wrote. This paper suggests that one avenue of understanding their ‘feminist’ efforts to engage with male power and to promote women as worthy of holding socially legitimate political authority is to explore the dominant attitudes and beliefs about gender, sex and embodiment of their eras. Christine’s intellectual orientation was informed by a quite conventional medieval attitude toward embodiment, according to which the Christian ideal envisaged two genders (as with Adam and Eve). As Thomas Laqueur and other scholars have explained, the biological body was single sexed, existing on a spectrum of maleness and femaleness. By contrast, Wollstonecraft is writing when modernity has invested the ideal of dichotomous male and female into the natural world to the extent the unequal dichotomy of sex and gender is taken for granted. This paper explores the way in which Christine is able to use the window of opportunity left open by the ‘one-sex’ body argue for women’s equality with men through the metaphor of the body politic. Wollstonecraft, arguing for women within the essentialized dualisms of her time, confronts a more difficult political project. Hence, despite their common association among the relatively limited number of women political thinkers,

Christine and Wollstonecraft need to be understood as representing two very different perspectives on such salient political questions as human equality and the embodiment of the public order.

**ELIZABETH MCCARTNEY**

**UCLA**

**‘The Art of Friendship, the Politics of Regency Government: A Study on the Collected Correspondence of Catherine de Medicis’**

Modern scholars have long studied the history of regency government through a prescriptive lens. The emphasis on a queen’s public authority in early-modern France has been predicated on belief that French lawyers and jurists forged a canon of French law that denied the legitimacy of female agency; argument that, from the mid-sixteenth century, jurists, foremost those in service to the law courts of the realm, posited an argument that they, not the widowed queen-mothers of France, were the true ‘guardians’ (co-tutors) of the resources of the crown and minor-child kings; and, finally, that the rhetorical bounds of friendship and kinship were understood to exclude the incorporation of women in the network of civic communal life. Specifically, the argument regarding the nature of *amicitia civile* as applicable only to male prerogative has become a commonplace in modern studies of early-modern culture.

This paper examines the historical context of the epistolary tradition within the institutions of power, foremost the regency government of Catherine de Medicis. For more than forty years, this queen was in charge of the government of France with full recourse to decisions affecting religion, diplomacy, and the execution of justice. Her authority was based in her status as wife, widow, mother, regent, and ‘mother’ to her subjects at large. To date, there has been little study of how the affective topoi of political discourse and royal government honored the queens of France as unique guardians of the realm’s resources.

Through careful study of the collected correspondence of Catherine de Medicis, I hope to encourage a thoughtful revision of both the political history of early-modern rulership and that of the modern understanding of the epistolary tradition.

**CATHERINE M. MÜLLER**

**INDEPENDENT SCHOLAR, SWITZERLAND**

**‘Inventing Women: Catherine d’Amboise’s *Livre des Prudents et Imprudents* or Negotiating Space for Female Voices in Political Discourse’**

Two aspects of Catherine d'Amboise's rhetoric will retain our attention: firstly, the way in which the female subject speaks of women inventors (their place in civilization); and secondly, the way in which the author reinvents these figures, changing the meaning of a woman's literary and political function in the history of exemplary discourse.

While explicitly referring to Boccaccio and Vincent de Beauvais, Catherine dresses up her catalogue of famous and infamous women in quite a dissimilar fashion. Moreover, while joining in the "Querelle des femmes", she employs other strategies than Christine de Pizan's in her *Livre de la Cité des dames*. Her particular rewriting of myths, her extensive use of allegory, her calling on affective mysticism, coupled with an inscription of her own voice and personal biography, make for a voluntarily unusual compilation of *exempla*. In fact, this paper will argue that Catherine d'Amboise's discourse on history conveys a consciousness of the specific role a female auctorial voice can play in the history of discourse.

**CARY J. NEDERMAN**

**TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY**

**'Christine de Pizan and Jean Gerson: A Case of Intellectual Influence?'**

Many studies of the political thought of Christine de Pizan have concentrated on her sources and antecedents, but few (if any) attempts have been made to examine the reception of her ideas and the possible impact they exercised upon later thinkers. The proposed paper represents a modest effort to remedy this defect by considering the relationship between Christine's *Book of the Body Politic* and Jean Gerson's *Letter to the Tutor of the Dauphine*. It is well known that Christine was close to Gerson, who was a powerful figure both at the French court and at the University of Paris; Earl Jeffrey Richards, in particular, has made a compelling case for the depth of their intellectual relationship. Gerson's *Letter*, one of his few extended meditations on secular political affairs and his only foray into the "advice-book for princes" genre, was written in 1419, well after the completion of the *Body Politic*. I shall demonstrate that some of the *Letter*'s main themes—including the nature of a royal education, the doctrine of the body politic, and the subordination of the priesthood to the French monarchy—reflect concerns that were arguably characteristic of Christine's *Body Politic*. Ultimately, the resonance of Christine's political ideas in the *Letter* is so strong that a plausible case may be made that Gerson drew on her thought in framing his own work of royal advice. Given the wide audience enjoyed by Gerson's writings in later times, this may afford one illustration of how Christine de Pizan's political thought entered into the "male stream" of the Western tradition.

**REGAN PENALUNA**

**BOSTON UNIVERSITY**

**‘The Political Thought of Damaris Cudworth Masham’**

Seventeenth and early eighteenth-century England produced many famous political theorists, especially Hobbes and Locke; and a far less known fact is that it also produced some of the first modern feminist political theorists, such as Mary Astell and Damaris Masham. Of these two women, the scholarship discusses the political arguments of Astell; but says little, if anything of Masham’s. This is strange, as one of Masham’s two works, *Occasional Thoughts in reference to a Virtuous or Christian Life* (1705), is primarily a political treatise. As scholars have not been concerned with the purpose of this work, they have also not understood its political or feminist import. In this paper, I will briefly discuss the nature of Masham’s political thought; more specifically, how she aligns herself with ancient Greek philosophers who, as she claims, view moral goodness as necessary for political success. Then, I will explain that despite her respect for ancient thinkers, Masham’s work is not an encomium to the ancients who got political theory right. In fact, as we shall see, she believes that ancient theories lack two major elements both of which if present will allow a modern political institution to surpass the success of any ancient government: namely, religion and the education of women. Finally, I will discuss the feminist dimensions of her political thought that have yet gone unrecognized.

**MARTINA REUTER**

**UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI**

**‘The role of the will in the thought of Catherine Macaulay and Mary Wollstonecraft’**

Mary Wollstonecraft is well known for her affirmation of the French revolution and its slogan *liberté, fraternité, égalité*. It has been noted that her conception of liberty is strongly connected to a conception of self-governance, which she shared with the movement of rational dissent (Barker-Benfield 1989; Sapiro 1992; Mackenzie 1993). This means that Wollstonecraft’s understanding of political liberty is deeply rooted in her moral psychology. When her moral psychology has been studied, the emphasis has been on the relation between reason and passion (Sapiro 1992; Mackenzie 1993; Green 1997), while the role of the will has been less considered. There is an obvious reason for this: Wollstonecraft is by no means a determinist, but the concept of the will seems to be more or less absent from her writings.

Interestingly, Wollstonecraft’s only explicit discussion of the freedom of the will can be found in her *Analytical Review* -review of Catharine Macaulay’s *Letters on Education* (1790). In my paper I attempt to study the role of the will in the thought of Macaulay and

Wollstonecraft by comparing the latter's mainly implicit understanding of the topic with Macaulay's explicit remarks. My focus will be on questions of moral psychology, but I will claim that these questions have significant relevance for our understanding of these thinker's views on political virtue.

In her book, Macaulay defends a conception of the free will based on the distinction between physical and moral necessity. Moral necessity consists in the irresistible force the understanding has on volition. Macaulay argues that the existence of strong or even irresistible motives does not contradict the freedom of the will. On the contrary, freedom is realised when we act according to true motives presented by reason. Macaulay's position is vulnerable to what has been called the platonic dilemma: how do we explain that people act against their reason and do what they know is wrong?

In her review, Wollstonecraft basically agrees with Macaulay's conception of the freedom of the will. The main difference between Macaulay's and Wollstonecraft's thought consists in the latter's more positive view on the passions and the imagination. Several writers have emphasised the importance of Wollstonecraft's conception of the imagination as a mediator between reason and passion and discussed the relation between Rousseau's and Wollstonecraft's views on this topic (Green 1997; Whale 2000; Taylor 2003). Rousseau and Wollstonecraft both conceive the imagination as an infinite, specifically human capacity, which – for the good and the ill – constitutes the basis of civilisation. I will claim that the main difference between their views is that contrary to Rousseau, Wollstonecraft conceives the imagination as a voluntary capacity. In addition to explaining Wollstonecraft's more optimistic view on civilisation, the voluntary nature of the imagination illuminates her implicit understanding of how the will works. Finally, I will claim that her conception of the imagination provides an at least partial solution to Macaulay's platonic dilemma.

**EARL JEFFREY RICHARDS**

**BERGISCHE UNIVERSITÄT-GESAMTHOCHSCHULE WUPPERTAL**

**'Political Thought as Improvisation: Theories of Female Regency and Mariology in Late Medieval French Thought'**

Christine de Pizan employs the allegory of the Virgin Mary not only as the Queen of Heaven but also as the Queen of Justice in her *Livre de la Cité des Dames* in order to postulate an implicit justification for female regency. The need for such an argument stemmed from the fact that regency per se, male or female, had at best a shaky legal basis in late medieval Europe.

Two texts by Christine addressed to Isabeau de Bavière (the dedicatory poem of the Harley 4431 ms and her *Epistre à la Reine*) turn on questions of the role of the queen in adjudicating legal disputes and of her power in general. I would suggest that these texts can best be understood within a larger context of discussions of political legitimacy which in go back to the older politico-theological of the *Dei gratia* principle and to questions of political legitimacy raised during the discussion of the succession to the French throne during the Hundred Years War and of the legitimacy of the murder of tyrants.

In all of these texts crucial issues of Christine's sources need to be investigated. Was Christine for instance influenced by the discussion of the role of Alexander the Great's mother found in ancient sources? Was she influenced by the Roman legal tradition regarding *hereditas legitima*? Was she influenced by traditions of Germanic legal culture (Isabeau was after all a Bavarian princess) as well in discussing the role of the queen mother as regent? The answers to these questions would seem to be that Christine combined different legal and theological traditions to provide an utterly original improvised argument on behalf of the exercise of political power by females.

**HILDA L. SMITH**

**UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI**

**“We are no Subjects”: Margaret Cavendish and the False Universal’**

Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, has proven a difficult subject for those studying women's political thought. The large and varied nature of her published corpus has led literary scholars to focus mostly on her fiction and poetry, historians of science to analyze her natural philosophy, and a smaller number of scholars interested in her political writings to draw on her *Sociable Letters* and *Orations of Divers Sorts*. While often situated within her husband's royalist circle, Cavendish lacked a direct contact with, or influence from, a major male political theorist or philosopher as did seventeenth-century authors such as Anne Conway, Damaris Masham or Mary Astell. Thus she has been more difficult to place within a particular intellectual context, and her sometimes contradictory works make it difficult even to locate her in an uncomplicated way within the royalist cause during the English Civil War.

Both her *Letters* and the *Orations* complicate our understanding of her political stance and identify her as one of the few early modern thinkers to postulate a theory about women's absence from the supposedly universal categories employed by those on both sides of the revolutionary divide. She contended that women lacked a comparable relationship to the state to that held by men, that poor men accused of theft were victims of “commonwealth makers”

such as Hobbes who constructed institutions that ignored or threatened their interests, that peasants contributed most to society and that such a contribution was not recognized, and finally that rank and file soldiers failed to gain from military exploits as did their officers. In these clearly non-royalist positions, she often used language and made arguments that sound eerily like the writings of members of either the Diggers or the Levellers. Yet we have little information, beyond textual evidence, to document such similarities. Cavendish's personal correspondence is virtually non-existent, and the one person she gave the greatest credit to influencing her intellectual interests, her brother-in-law Charles Cavendish, was a mathematician interested in science but little in politics. Thus we must speculate on the origins of these unexpected positions taken by an individual who married into a prominent royalist and aristocratic family.

Yet, whatever the influences, Cavendish was the earliest thinker to employ a gender analysis to question the goals of both royalists and revolutionaries. And her questioning was tied to a critique of the falsely universal language and categories used by each side. Both claimed to be speaking for the people when they were not, and both were less than truthful about their motives and personal interests in terms of political participation, religion, and economic standing in early modern England.

**PATRICIA SPRINGBORG**

**UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY/FREE UNIVERSITY OF BOLZANO**

**'Mary Astell as Theorist of Freedom from Domination'**

*If all Men are born free, how is it that all Women are born slaves? as they must be if the being subjected to the inconstant, uncertain, unknown arbitrary Will of Men, be the perfect Condition of Slavery? and if the Essence of Freedom consists, as our Masters say it does, in having a standing Rule to live by? (Mary Astell, Reflections upon Marriage, 1706 3dn, xi).*

Mary Astell problematized the condition of early modern women in a long and proud tradition of theorizing freedom, but one from which women had been more or less excluded. The latest installments of that tradition are being written by John Pocock, Quentin Skinner and Philip Pettit as chapters in the history of Republicanism. Their collective enterprise centres on the transmission of certain Roman notions of positive freedom, their reception in the early modern period and extenuation in post-modernity. Central to this tradition of republican thought is the

notion of freedom as moral autonomy or the absence of domination. Freedom from a *dominus* or lord, ‘freedom from servitude’, as Philip Pettit puts it, is positive freedom, as opposed to the negative ‘freedom from interference’ that would tolerate a ‘friendly master’. But *libertas* in the Roman republican tradition, even defined against the foil of slavery, did not stand alone as some abstract moral principle. It belonged rather within a range of highly contextualized legal principles: *ius*, right, *dominium*, property and *imperium*, power, and their refinements, which these women seem to have intuitively grasped.

The richness of this tradition of freedom and the definitional complexities that it involved may be gauged from an examination of the context for Astell’s claim. Pettit, in a brief discussion of Astell, reproduces her famous statement on freedom and slavery, noting that its frequency of quotation ‘testifies to the appeal of non-domination as a feminist ideal’. But Astell and her followers, Judith Drake, despite the centrality of the freedom/slavery antithesis to their arguments, stand in a paradoxical relation to the tradition of Republicanism as Pocock, Skinner and Pettit define it. Not the least consideration is the fact that they were both royalists, addressing their works to Princess, later Queen, Anne. But much more importantly, they immediately saw how hollow the freedom/slavery argument really was in seventeenth century England. For, with all the refinements of Roman Law and its successor, ecclesiastical Natural Law, stripped away, republicanism was barely distinguishable from liberalism itself – if we may use that term to characterize the early modern tradition beginning with Locke, which placed liberty at the heart of its cause. Perhaps, in fact, republicanism so denaturalized *is* liberalism, as its trajectory in the ideology of modern republican nation states would suggest. That the liberal tradition of freedom was a sham from a female perspective was argued by a long line of women writers. The pressure of such arguments, combined with the nineteenth century German theorization of freedom as subjective right, contributed to an attempt to recover some of the richness of the Roman Law and Natural Law traditions, in modern notions of natural rights as universal norms. Feminist contributions to the prehistory of modern civil society, founded on universal human rights, are important, but have received little attention hitherto.

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**“ ‘Marguerite de France, soeur unique du roy’: The Political Thought of Marguerite de Navarre”**

How do we uncover the political thought of late medieval and early modern women, given that few women held official political positions, and even fewer wrote about politics or political theory? Clearly, examining the actions of individual women can reveal the ways in which they took political action, which can in turn disclose their political thoughts. But which actions should we explore? We need to rethink what we define as political, to recognize that many activities generally associated with women and categorized as domestic, such as marriage negotiations, were explicitly political acts. With those few women who held official political positions, we can explore the actions they took in both the public, political realm of men and the private, domestic realm most women operated within. Marguerite de Navarre, who held an anomalous political role in early sixteenth-century France, provides a means of exploring the political actions of a woman who straddled male and female roles. As the sister of the king, Marguerite had the opportunities to influence French policy available to all royal noblewomen, as one of the “women behind the throne.” However, Marguerite’s intelligence and political acumen were recognized by her brother, and she was made one of the twelve peers of the realm two years after François I came to the throne, giving her an official political position denied to other French noblewomen. This individual woman, therefore, operated in both male and female ways, and an examination of her actions demonstrates that we need to reconsider the gender roles of both noblemen and noblewomen in this period, particularly in terms of politics. Although a prolific author, it is not her writings but her actions that reveal Marguerite’s political thought, which was based on her position as a powerful landowner and the king’s sibling. In terms of both domestic and foreign policy, Marguerite’s political goal was the same: to further her brother’s power while at the same time maintaining the traditional rights and privileges due to her as a peer of the realm and holder of several large territories. She never lost sight of the fact that her power was based on her unique relationship to the king, however, routinely listing her status as the “soeur unique du roi” before her list of titles on official documents. Her political position seems to have been accepted with very little opposition, based on the surviving evidence. Does this mean that Marguerite’s gender was not an issue for her contemporaries, or does it indicate that she was considered to be an atypical woman? Answering this question can tell us a lot about the actual gender roles among the early

sixteenth-century French nobility, which can in turn further our understanding of women's political thought.