ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: GYNOCOLONIAL LEGACIES: LASTING INFLUENCES OF THE FRENCH FOUNDING MOTHERS IN NORTH AMERICA

Elizabeth W Robinson, Doctor of Philosophy, 2023

Dissertation directed by: Professor Mercédès Baillargeon
Department of French and Italian

Within the annals of history, women have begun to emerge as silent architects and resilient figures who have navigated the labyrinthine constructs of patriarchal systems. Their stories are finding their way to the light of day and taking up more space than they have previously. Such is the case with the historical figures of *les filles du roi* in New France, and the Casket Girls in Louisiana. In this dissertation, I embark on a comprehensive analysis of literary works from Quebec and Louisiana and the representation of these historical figures within them. Through the stories about the women transported to the French colonies in the late 17th century and early 18th century to serve the patriarchy as wives and mothers, this study extends beyond mere literary and historical analysis and explores the influence of these women in shaping cultural identity reinforced by patriarchal norms.

GYNOCOLONIAL LEGACIES: LASTING INFLUENCES OF THE FRENCH FOUNDING MOTHERS IN NORTH AMERICA

by

Elizabeth W. Robinson

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2023

Advisory Committee:
Professor Mercédès Baillargeon, Chair
Professor Hervé-Thomas Campangne
Professor Caroline Eades
Associate Professor Alexis Lothian
Professor Amy Reid

Acknowledgments

"C'est grace à votre amour
Que j'ai trouvé mon chemin
Et quand j'ai eu des doutes
Vous n'étiez jamais loin
Quand j'avais le cœur lourd
Vous m'avez tendu la main
Et c'est ensemble que nous
L'écriront demain"
- *À vous,* Céline Dion

"Au pied d'une montagne
Je me suis levée
J'ai dû mener des campagnes
Pour la soulever
Et j'ignorais pouvoir de mes doigts la bouger
Jusqu'au moment où je l'ai fait
[…]
Au fond de moi je ne savais pas
Qu'elle était ma force"
- *Ma force*, Céline Dion

FAMILY
Rebecca – for pushing me when I dug my heels in, for helping me fight for myself, for being the best ever, and an extra set of eyes when I needed them. Both of us.
Carl & Michele Tsang, Pacheco Family, Danielle Sharpstene.

My sweet puggle, Missy, you've been there through everything, and I'll never have a more faithful friend or confident. Thank you for all the walks and playtimes you gave up so that I could write, or study; thank you for all the times you licked my face when I cried, for the sacrifices you made when I traveled for research, and for being a beautiful light in this world.

FRIENDS
My dear FRIT cohort – we truly are something special, and I'm grateful to each and every one of you for the kindness, encouragement, fun, and supportive atmosphere you provided over the years.
Julie, Fran, Cae, Hannah, Callan, Clara B, Guilhem, Clara D, Inaam, Samuel, Michaelle, Charlotte, Jillian, Lauren
Theavy – Where will we end up next?!
Charlee, Madeline – the ports that helped me stay afloat and ashore during some rocky weather.
Morgan – "you're gonna be great" – I have kept this in my head and heart, and your words and energy have gotten me through it all, thank you for this beautiful gift.
Léandra – my best friend, my partner in crime, my sister. Whether it was grading together in the office on a Friday night and singing Celine Dion's songs, seeing Celine Dion in Vegas after our Comps year, helping each other get through the Covid lockdown, celebrating your beautiful daughter, we started together, we're finishing together (at least in the same year). We did it!

Dear SPAP colleagues, Ofelia, Mariana, Neli, Ceci, Juan, Chris, Daniela, Jackson
GERM haferflocken extraordinaire, Wendy

Dr. (!) Briana Hyman

Alex Hughes, Kristy (Rapp) Malarney

Syracuse Fleet Feet, and my dear Nasties (Della, Eileen, Ellen, Kim, Jennie, Patty, Monica), you showed me that I could do really hard things (a marathon!), and that my greatest tools would be dedication, persistence, and a group of supportive, wonderful friends with whom to go the distance – and, often, a tutu.

MUSIC
Céline Dion – you were the first French language singer I ever heard, and I've loved your music ever since.

PROFESSIONAL
The FRIT professoriate – Dr. Baillargeon, Dr. Brami, Dr. Benharrech, Dr. Campagnge, Dr. Eades, Dr. Frisch, Dr. Mossman, Dr. Orlando, Dr. Scullen, Dr. Wegmann

MB – for your patience, persistence, and kindness to me during this whole process – I know it wasn't always easy, but you have a very dear place in my heart as a mentor, and as someone who helped me achieve my dream. I came to UMD to work with you, and you stuck by and believed in me to the very end – THANK YOU.

The dissertation committee – Dr. Baillargeon (chair), Dr. Campangne, Dr. Eades, Dr. Lothian, Dr. Reid

UMD Faculty
Dr. Linda Macri, Dr. Michele Mason, Dr. Jyana Browne, Dr. Elizabeth Papazian, Dr. Hester Baer, Dr. Eyda Merediz, Janel Brennan, Evelyn Canabal-Torres

The best mentors:
Dr. Amy Reid – I credit you for me being where I am, you were the first kind and personable academic that I met, (you asked me to call you by your first name!) and it encouraged me to continue to my studies – that's been the most significant contribution to this path. I am forever grateful to you as an academic, but more thankful to the Universe as you've become a dear friend and family.

Dr. Ana Patricia Rodríguez – for your invaluable mentorship, absolute kindness, open door and supportive ear. You gave so much in our conversations, and I'm grateful to have learned so much from you. You're the only person who ever made me consider doing another PhD, if that says anything!

Dr. Miléna Santoro – for the kind words, wonderful lectures, and all the time and energy you've spent with me, I so appreciate you and everything you've done for me. It's such a joy to know you.

Dr. Amy Ransom – you show me what it is to be an absolute powerhouse of a scholar and a phenomenal person who follows their passions and I'm grateful for all the time we're able to spend together.

Dr. Kate Harrington & Dr. Olivia Jones Choplin

Dr. Beverly Evans, for telling my young undergrad self that I'd be pursuing a higher ed degree in French, for pushing me to be better than I imagined, for mentoring and guiding me through some difficult situations, and for correcting all of my terrible essays, I owe you some red pens…

ACQS – THANK YOU for so many opportunities to learn, to present, to meet wonderful academics and people, and for a support system of inspiring Québécistes!
AIEQ – thank you for all the grants that allowed me to study in Quebec and share the province with anyone who'll listen.

Team DFL at West Point!

The French Section: Dr. Praud, Dr. Tonnerre, LTC Ruppert, LTC Van Sickle, MAJ De Rose, COL Le Cedre, CPT Gee, CPT Currie
MAJ Maia Molina-Schaefer – thank you for being such a kind friend, and my favorite role model of a female leader of character. I always appreciate your guidance, humor, and how you've blazed your own trail.

MAJ Cagle, MAJ Range, Dr. Mandzha, MAJ Baughman, CPT Lin, Dr. Holloway, LTC Santamaria, LTC Miller, LTC Lane, Crystal, MAJ Frye, MAJ Harris, MAJ White, MAJ Salazar, MAJ Oglesby, Dr. Shahid, Dr. Chenoweth

To my MA program, you were not easy. At all. You were tough and rigorous, and I learned a lot as a result.
Dr. Monroe Eagles – you're the GOAT.

To those I may have missed listing directly, forgive me, you were an important part of this journey, and I couldn't have made it this far without you.

And thank you coffee.

DEDICATIONS:

Lastly, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to two people who have had an impact on my academic career: Tom Steinfeld and Dr. Laurette Clough.

Dr. Clough, you were a wonderful professor and mentor, who always had time to talk and to share her pearls of wisdom, who always leant an open ear and gave genuine support. I feel very lucky to have known you and to have shared some wonderful and memorable conversations with you, Dr. Lauretta Clough – thank you so very, very much.

Tom, you were such a rock and buoy to me, providing sage advice, laughter, and friendship at SU, and so many opportunities to develop my academic career. I miss you all the time and wish you were here to celebrate this milestone, I wouldn't be here without you. I love and miss you all the time, sweet friend.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

Mother as undefined: exploring literary portrayals of the French Founding Mothers in North America

"The good mother is reinvented
as each age or society defines her anew,
in its own terms, according to its own mythology"
(Thurer in O'Reilly 196)"

From Women to Wives to Mothers, at the Service of the Patriarchy

Within the annals of history, women have begun to emerge as silent architects and resilient figures who have navigated the labyrinthine constructs of patriarchal systems. Their stories are finding their way to the light of day and taking up more space than they have previously. Such is the case with the historical figures of *les filles du roi* in New France, and the Casket Girls in Louisiana. In this dissertation, I embark on a comprehensive analysis of literary works from Quebec and Louisiana and the representation of these historical figures within them. Through the stories about the women transported to the French colonies in the late 17th century and early 18th century to serve the patriarchy as wives and mothers, this study extends beyond mere literary and historical analysis and explores the influence of these women in shaping cultural identity reinforced by patriarchal norms.

Each chapter offers a distinct lens through which I analyze the experiences of these French women and their impact on the North American colonial landscape. In examining the intricate relationships between the characters, and the norms and values that define their lives, I aim to illuminate the contradictions and ambiguities that thread through literary narratives, uncovering the nuanced ways the female characters serve as both agents for, and subjects of, the patriarchy. I will highlight the complexities of women's roles and the narratives that have

perpetuated their entanglement with the expectations and norms of patriarchal societies. In acknowledging the fortitude and resiliency that allow the women to operate within these systems, and in examining the societal norms that restrain their potential, I am able to highlight the ambivalence and ambiguity in the representations of women's roles and the expectations of motherhood placed upon them within the dynamics of the historical narratives of this dissertation. It is within these expectations of motherhood that the literature draws our focus, providing a framework for us to explore and grasp how societal norms and cultural influences shape the depiction of mothers and the act of mothering.

The concept of mothering and motherhood is deeply intertwined with cultural influences. As professor and psychologist Shari L. Thurer underscores in her exploration of the subject, diverse societies develop their unique mythologies, complete with rituals, beliefs, expectations, norms, and symbols around the mother, which significantly shape the way motherhood is understood and practiced (Thurer in O'Reilly 196). These expectations and norms can restrict women's agency and individuality, pushing them into predefined roles within the family, particularly as mothers and wives. In this context, motherhood is often idealized and prescribed as a primary role for women, holding them to unattainable standards and limiting their opportunities to explore other aspects of their identity and potential. Adrienne Rich in her book, *Of Woman Born*, writes that mothers have been both heavily idealized and exploited (xxiv). Indeed, it is difficult to think of a person, and role, more idealized and objectified than that of the mother. Thurer's perspective underlines that our perception of what constitutes an ideal mother is not a fixed, universal truth but a fluid construct, constantly redefined by the evolving mythologies of different ages and societies (Thurer in O'Reilly 196, as cited in Demos 64). The Western hemisphere may immediately think of the most idealized mother, the Virgin Mary.

Thurer writes in her chapter, “The Myths of Motherhood” in the book, *Maternal Theory*, that we cling to romanticized versions of mothers (Thurer ch 20). If there is one singular person in a person’s life, from infancy to adulthood, who is supposed to be able to meet almost all of their needs, it is a person’s mother. Thurer also writes “The all-importance of mother love has been fueled by a giant collective wish for perfect mothering. It is bolstered by a religion that gave us the Virgin Mary, nursery tales that supplied us with fairy godmothers, and a psychology that failed to question many cultural assumptions” (Thurer ch 20). She notes how the myth of the perfect (Western) mother is so pervasive in culture that no one stops to question that mother may not know best. Mother is either perfect, or morally corrupt. There is no space in which she can be anything but one of the hard dualities.

Considering the interplay of cultural beliefs and expectations surrounding motherhood, one must recognize that the way society idealizes and often presents mothers directly impacts narratives about motherhood. These perspectives emphasize the moral duty associated with motherhood and shed light on the societal celebrations and protections afforded to mothers. “Today, mother love has achieved the status of a moral imperative” (Thurer ch 20) and making sure she is aptly celebrated as such holds her in a flight pattern of maintaining the moral imperative. Jokes and curse words centered around the mother incite a kind of rage in the recipient that other insults do not. Even if one is not a mother, protecting her and her honor at all costs is everyone’s moral imperative.

Compounding this idealization is the romanticization of women embracing motherhood which further complicates their individual identities. The patriarchal influence is especially evident in the way motherhood is portrayed and enforced, which contributes to the loss of women's individuality as they conform to these predefined roles. A transformation begins upon

marriage, where women may adopt their husbands' names, "Mrs. John Doe," for example, and intensifies as they become mothers, subsuming their personal identities. Thurer captures the transformative nature of motherhood when she states, “Yet, even as mother is all-powerful, she ceases to exist. She exists bodily, of course, but her needs as a person become null and void. On delivering a child, a woman becomes a factotum, a life-support system. Her personal desires either evaporate or metamorphose so that they are identical with those of her infant. Once she attains motherhood, a woman must hand in her point of view” (197). Of normative motherhood, and in line with Thurer’s argument, Andrea O’Reilley writes “[c]hildren and culture at large do not see mothers as having a life before or outside of motherhood […] And, of course, mothers are not sexual!” (493). Thurer writes that, “A mother’s sexuality is usually threatening to her nuclear family: that is the human condition” (iBook). Yet women are more than the roles they occupy, and certainly have desires that may make others uncomfortable, now and in the past. As more literature is being written about women of the past, authors are able to explore their identities as individuals, wives, and mothers, and their unspeakable desires through the lens of the cultural constructs that define them. By examining these two groups of French founding mothers in their respective colonial settings and timeframes, this dissertation facilitates a discussion about a contemporary perception of women and the roles expected of them.

Thesis Statement

In this project I will look at how ambivalence and ambiguity function in literary works from Quebec and Louisiana in representations of the women brought over to the French colony as wives and mothers. This inquiry aligns with the broader objective of the dissertation, which is to investigate how these regions integrate historical maternal figures into their cultural fabric, demonstrate the significance of locally created myths and symbols as portrayed in the novels,

and scrutinize the normalization of women as mothers in society writ large, challenging prevailing perspectives in the collective unconscious. In looking at the various representations of women as wives and mothers in distinct cultures, my project seeks to ask and answer questions about ambiguities and ambivalences regarding women in historical narratives, as well as the tensions that arise within local and global contexts, and how the tensions shape the relationships between the women and their communities.

What to Expect in this Dissertation

Before beginning an analysis on the selected texts, it is fruitful to discuss the composition of the dissertation and the rationale guiding the chapter allocation. This introduction has begun by laying out the idea of women's stories, *herstory*, coming to light in recent decades, the romanticization of the mother in society, and the subsumption of the individual woman's identity. I will now provide a brief summary of the chapters and will then address the overarching genre of each novel. I will then discuss the historical novel, thus situating it in, and providing a literary and cultural contextualization and emphasizing the role of history, literature, and popular culture within a larger cultural imagination. Following the contextualization of the historical novel, I then offer a brief historiography of *les filles du roi* and the Casket Girls, which flows into a discussion about the American Dream, and the prospects for a better future while recreating society. Much like historical fiction, I then move into the present while looking back to the past and discuss how globalization has broken down barriers and encouraged some groups and individuals to look for their own origins and ancestry as a means of belonging. I then look to feminism, postfeminism, neoliberal feminism, and nationalism as ways of understanding the female historical figures of this dissertation. Making the dissertation and analysis relevant, I turn to the idea of women having - or not - control over their own bodies and governmental regulation

via biopolitics. Lastly, I look at how the body stores memories and passes them down through generations, and conclude with a summary of the chapter analyses, before beginning with Chapter One on Quebec.

The first chapter looks at Sergine Desjardins' novel, *Marie Major (2006),* set in Quebec, and focuses on *les filles du roi*. *Les filles du roi* hold a prominent place in history as early pioneers who ventured to New France in the 17th century. These women's journeys served as a blueprint for early colonization efforts in New France, illustrating the need for women to ensure the colony's growth and success - especially in terms of babies. In the novel, the author crafts a narrative about her ancestor, Marie, and how the enigmatic lens of honor makes her an ambiguous pillar of both resistance and continuity. Therefore, this chapter seeks to show how women are subject to the concept of honor, as decreed and expected by men who are perpetually in positions of power to judge and/or help them. Following this discussion, I turn to the Casket Girls in Louisiana, whose governing authorities subsequently adapted and applied the model of *les filles du roi* to replicate reproductive success.

Chapter two is the first of two chapters looking at Louisiana and discusses the idealization of the Casket Girls in Gretchen Craig's historical romance novels of *The New Hope* series: *Here will I remain* (2016) and *What We May Be* (2017) which both utilize the romance genre. In her narratives, Craig explores the lives of Casket Girls, akin to *les filles du roi*. *Here Will I Remain* begins with their voyage on the ship, the *New Hope*, portraying their settlement with husbands and communities in 18th-century Louisiana.

Craig's storytelling, reminiscent of Sergine Desjardins' *Marie Major*, offers varied character perspectives for a deeper understanding of their experiences. The morals and values conveyed are a commentary on contemporary, rather than historical, values, as Craig uses her

characters to address modern issues within a historical context. This approach serves as a platform to discuss current topics, such as domestic violence, sexual trauma, and labor abuse, demonstrating the enduring relevance of addressing societal concerns via literature.The analysis of Craig's novels seeks to show the ambiguous relationship between characters in romance novels and postfeminism, one in which a woman may feel liberated, while simultaneously playing into a neoliberal patriarchy.

The third chapter looks at the second thread of Louisiana literature, through Alys Arden's series, *The Casquette Girls,* which consists of *The Casquette Girls* (2015), *The Romeo Catchers* (2017), *The Cities of Dead* (2019), and *The Gates of Guinea* (2020). This series addresses the Southern Gothic genre, examining the literary and cultural influences of the founding mothers within this context. These novels illustrate literature written to appeal to young adults and utilize the historical and mystical backdrop of New Orleans and its legend of the Casket Girls as vampires to craft its narrative. It features an array of monsters, mysteries, ethnicities, and their intersections. The city's reputation for mysticism, voodoo, and blend of cultural influences provides fertile ground for narratives involving supernatural phenomena. Building on New Orleans' cultural influences and a natural disaster, we discover a mother who is both absent and monstrous, a theme that runs through the heart of Alys Arden's The Casquette Girls series. The chapter seeks to better understand the in-betweenness of mothers, when they are simultaneously present and not present and the effects it has on others, notably leading to a search for one's origins.

Corpus Rationale

The composition of the corpus of this dissertation reflects a deliberate and methodical approach to explore the literary representations of the two groups of French founding mothers in

North America *les filles du roi* in what is now known as Quebec, and the Casket Girls in Louisiana. While *les filles du roi* have not escaped scholarly attention, the body of fictional literature that focuses on their experiences is primarily entrenched in historical fiction, and the corpus of literature often mirrors each other in both style and perspective, and presents a uniformity in approach, narrative themes, and genre. In contrast, the literature surrounding the Casket Girls is not characterized by quantity, but rather by the diversity of genres present within the collection. These works primarily fall into two distinct categories: romance novels and Southern Gothic narratives. This dichotomy provides an avenue for exploring distinct thematic angles in the contexts of romance and the supernatural, extending beyond the historical framework. Ultimately, allocating two chapters to the Casket Girls and one chapter to *les filles du roi* in this dissertation is founded on the interplay between the choice of literature and the diverse genres represented. This choice not only ensures a balanced scholarly examination but also offers an opportunity to delve into distinct aspects of representation, culture, and the human experience in the colonial context. Also of note, each of the works selected for this dissertation were written by authors from the respective areas. Sergine Desjardins is a native Quebecker, Gretchen Craig is from the South in the United States, her website identifying her as having lived in "diverse climates and terrains," while Alys Arden is a New Orleans native. The chapters are designed to provide an authentic illustration of the themes and narratives centered on these historical figures by authors who live, or have lived, in these regions and the conscious and/or unconscious cultural understandings they bring to their work.

Why Stories Matter

Literature and narrative play a significant role in discussing social issues. Across time, cultures, geographic locations, and classes, stories serve a variety of purposes, one of which

includes helping people make sense of the concerns in question. Heilmann and Llewellyn note in their article, "Hystorical Fictions" that:

> the act of writing, recording, charting and documenting is a political act precisely because it brings about a connection between the consciousness of author/storyteller and reader/listener. History is on the one hand nothing more than a tale, and yet on the other it represents the only means available for individuals to communicate the past to the future: the narrative of the individual to the collective (4).

If reading and writing were not important political acts, governments would not go to the lengths of banning books from the public and from schools.

Literature offers a point of view, empathy, and can even forge a sense of solidarity between readers and characters. Rick Altman writes, "Stories constitute the bulk of sacred texts; they are the major vehicle of personal memory; and they are a mainstay of law, entertainment, and history. As Italian theorist and philosopher Benedetto Croce put it, 'Where there is no narrative, there is no history' (1951:26)" (1). In a similar vein, Hayden White notes, "To raise the question of the nature of narrative is to invite reflection on the very nature of culture and, possibly, even on the nature of humanity itself. So natural is the impulse to narrate, so inevitable is the form of narrative for any report on the way things really happened," (1). What each of these scholars depict is the necessity and essentiality of stories, and storytelling in every aspect of our lives. Where once stories were only told of kings and great men, for moral lessons and teachable moments, now stories of every aspect of life, from every point of view, are being told – sometimes even retelling the stories of kings and great men from an alternative, or sometimes unflattering, perspective.

As *L'imaginaire collectif* points out, "les représentations permettent d'interpréter le monde et renvoient simultanément à différentes sources de significations. Une première source est l'appréhension pragmatique de la réalité. Le discours tenu est un système d'explications qui vise à rendre compte d'une situation à partir de rationalités, de référentiels qui font autorité dans un ensemble social" (Guist-Desprairies 1-2). Representations, in the semiotic sense, allows readers to experience a re-presentation of the world, via language or art, from which they make meaning. This meaning will be influenced by their positionality in the world and the various intersectional spaces they occupy. Representations are not the real event being depicted, but rather reflect an interpretation of the event, a space in which, and for which, the event can be interpreted.

It is in this space of real depiction/not reality where the historical narrative excels. Not only is the historical component imbued and embedded with meaning, but the conflict presented in the work is telling of a parallel conflict in reality. By "parallel conflict" I mean that the historical conflict depicted in the novel may resemble a conflict faced in the community from which it is produced. For example, Alexander Dumas' 1884 work, *Les Trois Mousquetaires* looks at a mid-seventeenth century character, D'Artagnan, who gets involved with political affairs of the states. In focusing on the seventeenth century, Dumas is able to interweave current political issues and abuses of his time into the novel, reflecting the tensions and importance focuses of the late 19th century. In a 2019 article in the *New York Times*, the author, Megan O'Grady writes that we are currently in a time where instead of looking to literature for novels about the future, we are looking to the past to make sense of why we are where we currently find ourselves. She writes:

> A new kind of historical fiction has evolved to show us that the past is no longer merely prologue but story itself, shaping our increasingly

> fractured fairy tales about who we are as a society. The unmooring of time can be found everywhere, in battles for social progress we thought we'd already fought and won. In the media age, history is not simply a chain of facts recorded by scholars but a complex narrative harnessed by political parties and Facebook disinformation campaigns to speak to our sense of identity and belonging.

Despite a felt or perceived lack of control on/of/in the present and future, we can look back and reshape and romanticize the past, thereby anchoring us in something shared, concrete and specific, giving us a kind of comfort in our uncertain present discomfort.

Why Storytelling Matters

In this way historical literature functions like a game of telephone. The original iteration starts as the actual event, and after it has passed through several participants the narrative morphs into a completely different iteration. The only person who knows the truth of the story is the person who lived and experienced the event (keeping in mind that there may be several people who also experienced said event, and that each interprets it subjectively). Subsequent participants have to use the resources at their disposal to piece together what the last person said in order to make a coherent narrative. Each storyteller adds their own elements to the narrative; some may prefer to adhere strictly to the truth, reconstructing the original event with data, facts, evidence, and first-hand accounts, while others prefer to add whimsy or a touch of fantasy to the account. As others, such as Hayden White, argue, historical fiction cannot be taken as a true account of what actually happened, it is a work of fiction and must be treated as such. However, this does not discount the history of the event, nor the importance of what the narrative tells and reflects of the society from which it arises.

When a story is told, retold, and told again, it takes root in the popular imagination and fact and fiction become difficult to distinguish. As narratives are self-reflective, the values and ideals that a community seeks to uphold and preserve, and the fears its members hold, arise from the novel and are quite literally reflected back to the audience. In exploring the significance of literature in shaping historical narratives, we must also recognize the evolving landscape of storytelling and representation in popular culture. This shift towards more inclusive and authentic portrayals in cultural products has the potential to reshape the way we perceive history and its intersection with contemporary values and perspectives.

The Evolution of Storytelling

Accurate representation and visibility have largely been missing in cultural products. With free and accessible platforms like YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, self-publishing, etc., creating content is becoming easier for others who can then create their own stories, thus making more faithful and reliable representations, allowing others to see the creators as they wish to be seen, and for who they are. “The purpose behind such a narrative impulse is as multifaceted as the experiences conveyed by it. Some write from a personal need to find meaning in the past, explanations for the present or potential for the future. Others write from a desire to create a kind of historicist activism, ‘correcting’ or at least arguing for restitution concerning the events of a history from which their subject position has been excluded, abused or victimized” (Heilmann and Llewellyn 4). We bring with us our own values, mindset, and understanding. For that reason, a woman writing a novel about other women, for example, will necessarily assert her own judgments and values on the characters. It is difficult, if not impossible, to divorce oneself from their cultural viewpoint. For this reason, we must read these historical fictions with one eye to

the past, and one eye to the present in order to fully grasp what is being said in the novel, what values are being conveyed, and what is being left out.

Stacy Takacs writes in *Interrogating Popular Culture: Key Questions:*

> For cultural studies scholars, what distinguishes elite cultural forms from popular ones is not their quality but their accessibility. They do not view popular forms as degraded or deficient; they view them as usable. Yes, they say, Bollywood movies or American TV programs are obvious, clichéd, spectacular, ephemeral, and repetitive; that they don't measure up to the best classical literary or theatrical works is a given. But, this does not mean the texts are worthless or completely derivative. Each iteration of a musical is not the same as every other, and the differences in the application of the formula open up different sets of meanings and possibilities for user engagement. It is these potentialities and how they are activated that are of interest to cultural studies theorists, not just the aesthetic qualities of the work (7).

Popular culture can reveal much about a culture and mindset that a more elite culture cannot. As Takacs describes, popular culture is accessible to many while elite culture is accessible to few. Consider the romance novel genre, boasting an astonishing 19 million publications annually and grossing an impressive $1.44 billion in 2022, as reported by Wordsrated.com. This genre's profound impact on popular culture becomes evident when we examine its sales figures during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic[1], which soared exponentially compared to previous years. Fortune.com highlights the sale of over 47 million copies of romance novels in the US alone. As Catherine Roach notes in her book, the two

[1] https://fortune.com/2021/08/21/rom-com-pandemic-book-sales-romance-bookstore-day/

romance publishing giants, Harlequin and Mills & Boon, publish over 200 million volumes globally each year. It's crucial to recognize the significance of these numbers because they reflect not just a literary trend, but a popular cultural phenomenon that resonates with millions of readers worldwide. Contrast this with the popular streaming service, Netflix, which has just under 74 million subscribers in North America.[2]

Cultural products are influenced by these currents of popular culture, and societal values embed and manifest themselves within these cultural products. The job of the historian is to tell how feminism and women's rights were viewed in the concerned era; the job of the literary critic is to interpret the stories of the authors. As Maya Rodale suggests, historical fiction and popular romance novels offer unique insights into society. She writes:

> The type of history we get from historical romance and popular historical fiction is the kind I think many of us hunger for – the one about people who look like us, with experiences that are relevant to ours. It is the history that does not center on the accomplishments of white men, or a token queen, but talks about the lives, drama, accomplishments and relationships of everyone else. Because historical fiction is written in a way to be easy and engaging to read, the dynamics between people come alive, leap off the page, and make the history effortless to learn and understand. The history in fiction isn't a list of facts, it is a world we become immersed in as we read. It is often the history of women or other marginalized groups – the "hidden histories" to use a popular marketing term (201).

[2] https://backlinko.com/netflix-users

In the editor's introduction to Bourdieu's *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993), Randal Johnson writes, "Although they do not create or cause class divisions and inequalities, 'art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfill a social function of legitimating social differences' and thus contribute to the process of social reproduction" (2). It is apt to talk about social and cultural reproduction in a dissertation aimed at focusing on a project by the French government to reproduce itself in the New World.

As popular culture shapes and informs cultural products, revealing the interplay of societal values, it becomes evident that contemporary media, such as streaming services like Netflix, also play a role in reflecting and constructing narratives. Netflix has created a global platform for a large consumptive community. It is more extensive and pervasive than other distributors of its kind, though its existence has helped provide a space for other similar distributors to offer the same services. Historical narratives have also found a new and growing popularity and following in the online television and film streaming milieu. Series like *The Crown*, *The Borgias*, and *The Lizzie Borden Chronicles* speak to a desire to watch historical narratives, as well as to making meaning, or creating a context in which these extraordinary existences could occur.

Noël Audet writes in *Écrire de la fiction au Québec*:

> En bref, la fiction fait passer l'histoire, et la petite histoire, de leur statut de discours vrai à un autre statut, celui du discours vraisemblable. Ce n'est déjà plus de l'histoire, et pourtant les deux discours peuvent relater des événements identiques dans leur matérialité. C'est que la visée du texte à changé : elle n'est plus dévouée à la véracité des faits mais s'attache plutôt à rendre nécessaires les faits rapportés ou inventés, compte tenu d'un autre système de valeurs. Les faits racontés renforcent

> la crédibilité des personnages et le développement de l'ensemble du texte, les paramètres mesurant le rapport au réel sont passés dans l'œuvre elle-même plutôt que de continuer à se poser entre le texte et le référent historique (124).

The Intersection of Stories, Storytelling, and History

Historical fiction "creates a dialogue about national character and self-definition" (De Groot 95). This dissertation uses popular historical fiction as the base of its research and primary sources. The intersection between history and literature is not without its own set of problems. As Hayden White has shown, historians need narrative to effectively transmit their craft. It is more compelling to retell history as a story, rather than to present a cache of facts that need to be interpreted and put in order. On the other hand, while narrative fills this need to construct a cohesive narrative, it also has the power to take creative liberties, by telling a story from one point of view, by asserting one side of a story over others, by including certain details while ignoring others, by privileging one story over another equally valid, and valuable story.

White also notes that, "The historian's dissertation was an interpretation of what he took to be the true story, while his narration was a representation of what he took to be the real story" (28). This begins to answer the question, in part, of how history and literature work together in a historical novel. The chronicle, or historian's dissertation, is how the events are interpreted, while the narration is the representation of what the "real story" is perceived to be. This also illuminates the idea of subjectivity and objectivity within history, and White goes on to discuss, "the ambiguity of the term 'history'. "It unites the objective with the subjective side […] and comprehends what has happened no less than the narration of what has happened" (ibid 29). This combination of the emotional or felt experience with the factual experience results in stories that tell us more about us as a society today and how we perceive ourselves.

White argues that without tropes and figures of thought that a story does not exist. The assigning of roles and meaning to people in chronological historical events – or representations and interpretations thereof – is what provides the literary aspect to the narration of history. He seems to say that the particular way of making meaning via literary tropes and an active attempt to "understand the events," as opposed to merely comprehending its basic chronology, is how the historical narrative functions. Events do not stop, they continue even as actions ebb and flow such as in the case of war or times of peace; where the author or historian starts and stops a particular narrative is one way for them to exert their subjectivity onto a series of events. White writes, "These explanations [meaning how a historian/author views a moment in history] serve as a means to understanding 'what happened' rather than as ends in themselves" (50). Thus in the writing of the historical narrative the aim in view should be to represent (human) events in such a way that their status as parts of meaningful wholes will be made manifest. He writes, "To grasp the meaning of a complex sequence of human events is not the same as being able to explain why or even how the particular events that the sequence comprises occurred. One might be able to explain why and how every event in a sequence occurred and still not have understood the meaning of the sequence considered as a whole" (50). White then looks to Ricoeur who adds to the discussion his work on narrative and time. Ricoeur's contribution to White's work reflects how, "the plot … places us at the crossing point of temporality and narrativity: to be historical, an event must be more than a singular occurrence, a unique happening. It receives its definition from its contribution to the development of a plot" (51).

As McCalman and Pickering write in their book*, Historical Reenactment*, "One of the unintended outcomes of postmodern appropriation has been that the appropriated artwork can often usurp the original, supplanting it in the mind of the viewer" (2). It is important to

remember when reading historical fiction, that in the end, it is still fiction. Due to the realistic nature of historical fiction, it is easy for the reader or viewer to want to interpret the narrative as truth, however one must curb this impulse. Historical fictions have the ability to leave out as much as they include in their narratives. For this reason, the historical facts of the women sent over from France will be presented in each chapter in this dissertation in order to better understand the disparity between what happened, and the contemporary interpretation of events.

Noting the distinction between fact and fiction is important for several reasons. Not only does it demonstrate the difference between what happened and what is being told, but it also shows what a specific society values and how they depict said values. As Jameson writes in *The Political Unconscious*, "certain texts have historical-and sometimes even political-resonance" (17). Cultural products are indeed products of their time. They either interact with, or resist, popular hegemony.

There is also a scientific aspect to the historical narrative. The combination of the social sciences (history) and linguistic sciences (semiology) provide a trustworthy backdrop for the audience of the historical narrative. However, the telling and retelling of history is never neutral. It is an act imbued with power, ideology, and a specific positionality. As Alex Rosenberg notes in his book, *How History Gets Things Wrong*, historical narratives lure the reader into a false sense of security, in that they believe the work to be true and faithful to what actually happened. And yet this is not the case. Whereas a reader may actively question a work of a different genre, they are more susceptible to accept an historical novel without a critical eye. This allows the authors of historical narratives a power dynamic that is not as present in other genres. Be they in the form of a novel, a film, or other artistic mediums, historical narratives provide a very specific and unique framework to its audience. What can we glean and understand from reading a

historical narrative? While authors or creators of creative works have authorial control over their pieces, there are often undertones and tensions that belie the work without their knowledge. The same kind of multi-significant or plural-meaning which is found in the context of the historical narrative is also found within the collective imaginary, or the political unconscious, as termed by Fredric Jameson. *The Political Unconscious* underlines that there are unconsciously felt social and cultural problems which are read and understood in a work. The task of the reader of historical narrative, then, is to unpack the various meanings, anxieties, and tensions that arise in the work in order to understand the underlying social and cultural problems.

Jameson goes on to argue that the only way to interpret history is through a Marxist philosophy. "Only Marxism can give us an adequate account of the essential *mystery* of the cultural past, which, like Tiresias drinking the blood, is momentarily returned to life and warmth and allowed once more to speak, and to deliver its long-forgotten message in surroundings utterly alien to it" (19). Jameson highlights the impossibility of the past to speak again in an actual, present moment, and thus its inability for it to speak for itself. It is mediated through both the present and through a speaker. That historical fictions can faithfully depict the past is a fallacy. Historical fictions are written by contemporary people, and no matter how well researched their works may be, theirs is still a work of fiction. Tiresias may return to deliver the "long-forgotten speech," however that speech is mediated through a present actor, imbuing the speech with their perspective, biases, and personal experiences. In part, the actor renders the speech theirs, and not necessarily Tiresias'.

The agency to tell one's own story on their own terms is not always afforded to everyone. Often stories are told on behalf of others by the dominant hegemony, and one's ability to speak for themselves is usurped by those with more powerful platforms. The prevalence of stories

being told by those who have previously been unable to tell their own story is important, and necessary. How do we approach this when the speaker in question is long deceased? Historical fiction attempts to fill this gap, but often with varying degrees of truth, and certainly with many degrees of subjectivity and cultural baggage.

Perhaps it is the resurgence of interest in women and women's histories, for untold or hidden stories, a genealogical interest in one's ancestry, or simply the desire to capitalize on a popular lore that has encouraged authors like Sergine Desjardins, Gretchen Craig, and Alys Arden to write, create, and engage with the past in their novels. The enduring stories of *les filles du roi* and the Casket Girls and the impact of sending the French women to the colonies has produced divergent sets of literatures, stereotypes, and myths, while also signaling the cultural impact of these founding mothers.

The Stories of Historical Figures

Filles du Roi

When Louis XIV put into action his program to send over young, marriageable women to the burgeoning colony of New France he could not have imagined the lasting impacts of this political decision. Over the course of ten years, from 1663-1673, roughly 770 women made the voyage from France to what is now Quebec, and created a legacy that remains ever present in cultural mythology. These women, *les filles du roi*, as they were named by Marguerite Bourgeois, a non-cloistered nun and their instructor, were taught how to be wives, mothers, and how to work with, and in, this new land. Roughly 50 years later, the success of Louis XIV's gynocolonial project (a term coined by Carol Mossman in *Politics and Narratives of birth*) was

duplicated in an attempt to achieve the same result in Louisiana.[3] Who were the young women that the Crown sent over to New France? What were the conditions that warranted the need of young French women as wives and mothers in the colony in the 17th century? What then encouraged these women to go to a place that Marie de l'Incarnation described as, "un « lieu d'horreur » et les « faubourgs de l'enfer »" (Dumas 13), and one that was "associated […] with frigid winters and the threat of Amerindian violence" (Tuttle 95).

Much of what we know today regarding *les filles du roi* comes from letters from those sent to Canada on a *mission civilatrice*, the Jesuits, and Mère Marie de l'Incarnation, both with their prolific letters to France. Sœur Marguerite Bourgeoys who founded the, still existing, Maison Gabriel in Ville-Marie to educate the young women on how to tend to a home as wives, mothers, and Christians, is said to have named the group of young marriageable woman, *les filles du roi* (Beaudoin 37, Landry 19). Presenting perhaps the biggest affront to the young women's honor are the correspondences and remarks from the Baron La Hontan. As Lanctôt writes, "toute l'Europe lettrée, depuis le philosophe Leibnitz, jusqu'au romancier Le Sage, et tout le public, avide de relations exotiques, ont lu la page fameuse, où La Hontan décrit la présentation aux célibataires du Canada des impures Vénus arrivées de France et leur mariage en vitesse par devant le notaire et le curé de Québec" (13). Despite these accusations, historians have argued that the *filles du roi* needed to be upstanding women in order to travel as part of Louis XIV's program.

[3] As defined by Carol Mossman, gynocolonialism is, "the nascent ideology of motherhood [that] collides with modes of discourse that invade and colonize the maternal body, generating a considerable burden of anxiety expressed in the nineteenth-century French novel." For the purposes of my dissertation, I define the term as the state use of women's reproductive capacities to have children in an effort to reproduce the original country (France) in the colonized land, (New France). For this reason, I refer to the French crown's projects of *les filles du roi* and the Casket Girls as gynocolonial projects.

In the early 17th century, the *Compagnie de la Nouvelle-France,* more often referred to as the *Compagnie des Cents Associés*, was in charge of setting up the colony and making it profitable, via trade with the native population, especially in beaver furs, and clearing the land. Leslie Tuttle, Professor of History at Tulane University, writes in her book, *Conceiving the Old Regime*, that the power and control of the *Cents Associés* had been given to Catholic officials, who, in turn, turned the power over to the men in the colony (93). She writes, "This state of affairs—a colony virtually unsupervised by the royal government—was hardly in keeping with the push for renewed royal authority that characterized the early years of Louis XIV's personal reign" (93). Tuttle goes on to note that Louis XIV, "formally dissolved the Company of New France in 1663 and declared his intention to rule his empire in New France directly" (93). Tuttle shows that Louis XIV's intervention was necessary, as the *Cent Associés* routinely did not meet their quota of workers to send to New France, and when indentured laborers did go to New France, they often either returned to France after their tenure, or stayed on for a few extra years to make their fortune in fur trapping and then return to France (95). Working with his minister for colonial affairs, Jean-Baptiste Colbert, and Louis XIV created a well-incentivized program so that, "population, marriage, and childbearing remained fundamental to the royal goals in New France" (Tuttle 93).

In her book, *Frenchmen into Peasants: Modernity and Tradition in the Peopling of French Canada*, Leslie Choquette writes of the *filles du roi*, "The recruitment of marriageable women also concerned the state in the mid-seventeenth century, for sexual imbalance discouraged male settlement and impeded population expansion. Private recruiters, whether French or Canadian, had limited success in embarking single women, who did not respond as readily to the arguments that persuaded men" (271).

The program created by the French crown encouraged young women to travel to New France to marry men in the colony, some of whom were fur trappers or *coureurs de bois* and others who were members of the Carignan-Salières regiment in the military, and to set up homes as wives and mothers. The men had been equally encouraged (often by monetary rewards, though sometimes by the threat of having their licenses removed) to remain in the colony and to set up their homes and lives there; however, without anything but the prospect of making their riches to keep them in New France, the men had no reason to lay down roots. What the men needed to keep them tethered to New France was wives, and marriageable women were highly prized. At that time, depending on the location in the colony, there were "between six and fourteen French men for every French woman of marriageable age" (Tuttle 95). Thus, the few women available were in high demand. Leslie Tuttle writes of the women:

> By far the most famous of the royal government's efforts to increase the colony's population was the program that sent 770 women of marriageable age to New France between 1663 and 1673. The women sent by the government, dubbed by historians the *filles du roi* or "king's daughters," were recruited from charitable institutions in Paris or from surrounding areas like Brie and Beauce. The average *fille du roi* was an orphan in her early twenties who had grown up in an urban environment. Although urban women were, perhaps, unlikely partners in the labor of hewing a homestead out of the forest, when the ships carrying the *filles du roi* arrived in harbor in late summer or early fall, they were met by hordes of men eager to form households. The arrival of the *filles du roi* precipitated a frenzied autumn of marriage contracts and wedding ceremonies. The royal Intendant's last dispatch before the winter freeze that cut off communication with Paris usually noted that the majority of

them had already married; only a small number waited more than six months before pronouncing their vows in a church (96).

Figure 1.1 *Les filles du roi*

In his work, *Les Filles du Roi du XVII^e siècle*, Yves Landry has set up specific criteria that must be met in order for a female emigrant in the late 17th century to be considered a *fille du roi*. He writes "[s]eule suffit la présomption fournie par l'année d'immigration, la liberté de contracter mariage et l'absence apparente d'aide privée" (24). Therefore, only women who were sent between the years of 1663 and 1673 to New France for the express purpose of marrying and raising a family, who were paid for by the Crown can claim to be *filles du roi*. Historians such as Yves Landry, Silvio Dumas, and Peter Gagné have written works in which the first few chapters are dedicated to the history of these women and the conditions which brought them to the colony, while the majority of their work is dedicated to biographical accounts of each *fille du roi.* As regards statistical information about these women, Gustave Lanctôt shows that the average age of the women was 24 (85), approximately two-thirds came from Paris, (and one-third from

other cities in France) (87) and of those who did come from Paris, many likely came from the Hôpital général, also known as the Salpêtrière. Peter Gagne has also written a two-volume history with biographical repertoire on *les filles du roi.* His work was largely influenced by Landry and Dumas. Peter Gagne writes regarding the status of women entering the Salpêtrière,

> It was often the death of one or both parents that led to the decision to become a *Fille du Roi*. It is commonly believed (and written) that the *Filles du Roi* were all orphans, but this is not entirely true. With data known for 683 of these women, only 11.3% are proven to be "full orphans" - those who lost both parents prior to their departure. A total of 56.7% lost at least their father, while 19% lost only their mother. When the data is taken as a whole, 64.4% of the *Filles du Roi* lost at least one parent, if not both. (21).

La Salpêtrière is a place that comes up often in literature regarding *les filles du* roi. According to Lanctôt, the definition of an 'hôpital' is a, "« Lieu pieux et charitable, où on reçoit les pauvres pour les soulager de leur nécessitez », et il ajoute : « L'Hôpital Général est celui où l'on reçoit tous les mendiants. »" (89). He goes on to note the importance of the Salpêtrière in particular by stating, "Comme la Salpêtrière en était de beaucoup la plus importante, tout le monde écrivait ou disait couramment la Salpêtrière pour l'Hôpital général" (94). For this reason, he says, the Salpêtrière is synonymous with the Hôpital général.

Lanctôt also details the number of women who were sent to New France every year of the program:

Year	# of women sent	Year	# of women sent
1663	38	1669	170
1664	0	1670	164
1665	100	1671	150
1667	90	1672	0
1668	109	1673	60
			Total: 881

Figure 1.2 *Number of women sent to New France every year between 1663 and 1673.*

Of the 881 women sent to New France, only 770 can be classified as *filles du roi* according to Yves Landry. As Lanctôt explains, some women came and decided not to stay, others decided to take the veil, some perished at sea. Lanctôt's records show how many women were sent by the Crown, while Landry offers the total of 770 women who are able to claim the title as a *fille du roi.*

In addition to having their passage across the Atlantic paid for by the Crown, the women also received a gift of clothing, or a *trousseau*, and a dowry of 50 *livres*, thereby linking them closer as the King's daughters, and the king as their symbolic father (Lanctôt 74). As Lanctôt details, the *trousseau* consisted of, "les hardes devaient comprendre, outres les habits, les articles suivants : 1 cassette, 1 coiffe, 1 mouchoir de taffetas, 1 ruban à souliers, 100 aiguilles, 1 peigne, 1 fil blanc, 1 paire de bas, 1 paire de gants, 1 paire de ciseaux, 2 couteaux, 1 millier d'épingles, 1 bonnet, 4 lacets et 2 livres en argent." (74). Such goods may have been appropriate for a life in France, however one wonders how well the materials and garments stood up to the Canadian winters that were so infamous in the French imagination.

Perhaps the most important aspect of this exchange was the women's ability to make the choice for themselves of which man to take as their husband (Landry 205). This choice was not always an option for women, whose marriageability was used as a tool by their families to make the most advantageous alliances possible and raise their social status. For the women to have this power in their own hands, to be able to make their own choice, was quite novel for the time.

Regarding cultural imagination and *les filles du roi*, Yves Landry writes, "Elles occupent aussi une place fondamentale dans l'univers mental des historiens parce que leur immigration est survenue à un moment crucial de l'évolution politique et démographique de la colonie" (13). Choquette adds detail to Landry's definition of a *fille du roi* and supports Desjardins' emphasis on honor. She writes, "A willingness to emigrate did not in itself qualify a woman to become a *fille du roi*, as Talon's references to the 'king's design' suggests. What was at stake was her suitability, in terms that were phrased most explicitly by the minister in the following decade: 'The king transports no women of ill repute to the American colonies, but gladly young ladies raised in hospitals who are healthy and have not been debauched'" (272). And yet, the myth that these women were of ill repute remains in the collective imaginary of some.

Figure 1.3 *The Arrival of French Girls at Quebec 1667 by Charles William Jefferys*

Casket Girls

Figure 1.4 A widely circulated image of the Casket Girls, creator unknown.

It is much more difficult to commit to the (or even *a*) history of the *filles à la cassette* than that of *les filles du roi.* There have not been dedicated historians for the Casket Girls like Gustave Lanctôt,[4] Yves Landry, and Silvio Dumas, among others, for the *filles du roi* who have sifted through archives and come up with agreed upon criteria for who could have been considered a Casket Girl. Much of the information that exists on these women appears to come from popular sources such as websites and cultural productions like family genealogies, Facebook pages, historical fiction, and television episodes.

[4] According to the Canadian Encyclopedia, Lanctôt was more than an archivist and historian. The Encyclopedia writes that he, "was an eminent historian who specialized in the history of New France. He served as Dominion Archivist from 1937 to 1948" (The Canadian Encyclopedia). Lanctôt also pursued graduate studies as a Rhodes scholar at Oxford, according to the Encyclopedia. The historians who have worked on *les filles du roi* necessarily cite Lanctôt's work in their own.

The details surrounding how many women came over and when is difficult to pin down. Some historians like Jennifer Spear and Peter Hamilton claim that the Casket Girls are also the Pelican Girls of 1704. Virginia Gould claims that the "so-called cassette girls were the young women who, between 1719 and 1721, were scooped out of the orphanages, poorhouses, and maybe even prisons of France, either by seduction, threats, or outright force, and deported to Louisiana as potential brides" (389). Bruce Ardoin and Randall Ladnier assert that the *Baleine* left France in 1720 and arrived in early 1721 with 88 young women in Louisiana (Ardoin 303, Ladnier 23). Most accounts say that the Casket Girls arrived in 1728. *The New Orleans Advocate*, a Pulitzer Prize winning newspaper published in New Orleans, Louisiana since 1837, has perhaps the most synthesized answer of all the sources looked at for this dissertation. On their website they acknowledge that there were several groups of women who arrived at different times and that they were all considered Casket Girls. *The New Orleans Advocate* writes that "The first group […] arrived in Mobile in 1704, A second group arrived in Biloxi in 1719, and a third group of 78 arrived in New Orleans in 1728" (Advocate Staff Report). There exists a new discrepancy, however, between the number of young women who arrived in 1728, was it 78 or 88? The facts surrounding the Casket Girls are murky.

Even the location of where the young women arrived can be perplexing from a modern-day perspective. While authors write of travels to Louisiana, they may also write of the Casket Girls arriving in Biloxi or Mobile, which are two cities currently located in Mississippi. The time frame of the Casket Girls, though difficult to name exactly, occurred before the Louisiana Purchase. Figure 1.5 illustrates the French expansion in North America between the 16th and 18th centuries and shows the vastness of French colonization in North America.

Figure 1.5 A map of French establishments from the 16th to 18th centuries, the French Service hydrographique et océanographique de la marine. Gallica.

Uncertainty surrounding the Casket Girls can be unsettling and take away from the credibility of their lived experiences; however, perhaps it is more a question of lack of attention paid to these women instead of fabricated facts. The French are notoriously detailed and methodical when it comes to bureaucracy and paper-trails. The information surrounding *les filles du roi* in Quebec sat quietly in various archives until historians and scholars looked for and found the information about them and created the detailed genealogies and histories we have today. One can hope that the same can happen for the Casket Girls; however, in the interim the murky facts have led to interesting interpretations of their lives with a distinct Louisiana twist. Because historical fiction is a genre that seeks to recreate and imagine past events through the

lens of storytelling, the uncertainty surrounding what really happened to the Casket Girls allows authors to take creative liberty with fewer factual restraints, thus offering potentially plausible alternatives and believable narratives.

Some historians, such as Walter Hart Blumenthal and Marcia Zug make the claim that these women possibly never even existed. Blumenthal writes the following in 1962, which is picked up by Zug in 2016:

> Diligent search for the name of the ship on which the lauded 'casket girls' were supposed to have come in 1728, and for a list of the twenty-three "virtuous maidens" celebrated by all American historians of Louisiana as the precious cargo of this vessel, revealed the voyage and the flawless contingent as *mythical*. The confusion into which Hamilton falls, misled by Gayarré, is not to be wondered at, considering the paucity of records and their contradictory details. It cannot be shown with certainty that there were two consignments of brides in 1704–the first of twenty, the second of twenty-three, though this is likely, and does not lack contemporary evidence (95).

The contradictory and mixed information and evidence, or lack thereof, surrounding these women create an air of confusion and misinformation, not allowing their stories to be shared, and thus creating space to construct and disseminate a false narrative.

In her book, *New Orleans Vampires*, Marita Woywod Crandle writes,

> These conflicting accounts on the topic of the Casket Girls were simply carelessness on the part of the historians who created the confusion about who these girls were and when they actually arrived. However, after sifting through the information, it is now clear that the Baleine Brides were, in fact, the cassette girls, later known as Casket Girls, who sailed

> to Louisiana under the care of the sisters of la Salpêtrière, and most likely were directed to Biloxi. However, the girls might have migrated independently to many different areas of Louisiana thereafter. The Ursulines then arrived in 1728, many years after the Casket Girls landed in Louisiana" (41).

Much like *les filles du roi*, rumors and stories have circulated regarding the morality and honor of the women who came over. In Joan Dejean's book, *Mutinous Women*, she details the history of women who were shipped from France and sent to Louisiana, thus becoming the French founding mothers of the colony. To be clear, the women Dejean writes about are not the Casket Girls. The women she writes about do not fit the criteria of being considered a Casket Girl, though there are similarities between the two groups, such as coming from *la Salpêtrière* and travel being paid for by the crown. Dejean writes, "the convict women of 1719 are often confused with women who later sailed from France to Louisiana and who are known as 'casket girls' because, it is said, they were given personal effects and a small sum of money to be kept in a casket or chest to serve as a dowry when they reached their destination" (2). Moreover, these women were often falsely convicted of crimes just so that they could be sent to the colony. She also writes, "While these women had also come from the Salpêtrière, they had all been taken, or so it was said, not from the dreaded La Force, where the deported women were imprisoned, but from the section where girls and women from impoverished families were housed. They had all allegedly traveled not 'by force' but voluntarily" (208).

As Alice Morse Earle writes in her book, *Colonial Dames and Good Wives*, "In 1728 came another company known as *filles à la cassette,* or casket girls, for each was given by the French government a casket of clothing to carry to the new home; and in later years it became a

matter of much pride to Louisianians that their descent was from the casket girls, rather than from the correction girls" (7-8).

While the point of this dissertation is not to sort fact from fiction, one must recognize that understanding what remains unrepresented is as crucial as comprehending what is portrayed, and more significantly, why it is depicted as such. Yves Landry shows that *les filles du roi* had a defined set of criteria to fulfill in order to come to New France, though this is not always explicitly laid out in novels. Joan Dejean shows in her book that the history for the women who went to Louisiana was not simple or clear cut, unlike the romanticized and idealized representation seen in the novels. Dejean also notes how these women were born and raised in France, and had only French knowledge of cuisine and the environment; so while the French customs may have brought a modicum of comfort to their husbands who could reminisce with their wife and carry on certain traditions, they may not have served the women in the New World's environment, yet the customs and traditions feature minimally in the stories. The climate, the animals, the cuisine were all entirely different and out of the colonists' realm of conception. They did not have an understanding of where they were, what they needed to do, or how to do it, however the novels blend them harmoniously into their new environments. Understanding the contextual factors surrounding these women's actual lived experiences is essential. They extend beyond the pages of fiction to the historical backdrop within which the women's stories unfolded. These narratives, while not solely focused on depicting factual accounts, provide valuable insights into the complexities of the 17th-century socioeconomic landscape and, in turn, inform our examination of the American Dream's relevance within the context of the French founding mothers.

The Hope for Upward Mobility

Why did people sign up for these programs? In examining the concept of the American Dream - the hope for upward mobility - in the context of the French founding mothers, one needs to consider the class struggle prevalent during the 17th century. Jameson cites Marx as having written, "'The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles: freeman and slave, patrician and plebian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman–in a word, oppressor and oppressed […]'" (20). The class struggle in the instance of the French founding mothers is relevant. One of the most convincing arguments to encourage the women to travel to New France was that with hard work and dedication to a new life, these women could experience upward mobility for, perhaps, the first time in their lives. Class mobility was quite rigid in France in the 17th century; to have the opportunity to improve one's station in life was a big deal. Women had few choices in their life, and sometimes the only choice they had was in their choice in husband. Therefore, to be able to choose one's own husband and to have the opportunity to imagine a new start on life must have been quite appealing to these women.

In the introduction to Lauren Berlant's book, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City*, she introduces the concept of the American Dream. She writes that it is,

> A popular form of political optimism, it fuses private fortune with that of the nation: it promises that if you invest your energies in work and family-making, that nation will secure the broader social and economic conditions in which your labor can gain value and your life can be lived with dignity. It is a story that addresses the fear of being stuck or reduced to a type, a redemptive story pinning its hope on class mobility (4).

The American Dream extends beyond the borders of what is now the United States and can be said to encompass all of North America, but perhaps it can be considered that the American Dream began during the period of colonization when, in this particular instance, French citizens were encouraged to come to North America to pursue an upward mobility, and to strike it rich in the colonies.

The desire for the American Dream and to acquire material comfort and raise their social standing was not only held by the women who would travel to New France and Louisiana, but also shared by other French citizens. In her book, *Mutinous Women,* Joan DeJean notes the investment in the "delirium" and "madness" that surrounded John Law's morally shaky investment opportunities in the Louisiana colony (34). Parisians, in particular, were so enthralled with the idea of making quick money that they invested what they had, without concerning themselves with the morals or ethics of what they were actually investing in (39). Law made this even easier by encouraging folks to buy stocks, an investment in an abstract concept rather than in the reality which meant the incarceration and deportation of unjustly convicted women.

This concept of the American Dream is echoed in the novels. Their claims that women are the strength of the family, that the women made a choice to travel across the seas for true love, or that the women are able to come back and solve centuries old curses, posit these women as having agency, autonomy, and excellent moral character. What this dissertation can do is depict and discuss how the female protagonists are depicted as they are, and why. In all instances, I will argue that the representations of these women are idealized versions, or cultural products, of what their respective societies would like to see as a/the contemporary woman.

Bombarded with scenes of potential love, potential romance, potential success in this gestational phase of the founding families, readers see the beginnings, or the current descendants,

but never the process of laboring and raising the nation. We never see the birth, and when we do it is via the information from others—one character describing that a woman had a tough birth, maybe that she died in labor—but this information is mediated via a secondary source. It is never directly confronted, much like it is impossible to confront the birth of a nation head on. We cannot envision the hard work of nation building, we only know, see, and understand the results. It takes far more than just a dream.

Even the women themselves are idealized, nationalistic representations of those living the American Dream. Spotlighted in these works are the best, brightest, strongest, most resilient women the nation has to offer. It is symbolic of the ideals of nationhood and memory. We want to believe that we are descended from mythical women, not those who were forced over to do the economic dirty work of a State machine. We want to put these women on a pedestal to idolize and idealize them. In order to believe in the selflessness and goodness of this biopolitical economic mission, we must also believe in the selflessness and goodness of the State. However, in looking at Joan DeJean's work, *Mutinous Women* we see that in the case of Louisiana, women were often sent against their will to the colony, and sometimes even sent while married[5]. And yet the stories told in the novels that I will look at in this dissertation do not reflect the entire truth of the past. The idyllic and romanticized narratives, told about these women are not faithful to their actual, lived experiences, but they do, however, depict a reality that authors and readers want to see. It is the aim of this dissertation to analyze the works and see what the author is showing the reading public, and to answer the ever-present question: why are they writing this, and not that? What does what they are showing us mean, and why might it matter? The stories give the reader

[5] "Nowhere in the discussion was there any attempt to raise what should have seemed fundamental legal questions. Many women, for example, were married, and under French law it was illegal to separate them permanently from their husbands. No official, however, brought this up or wondered what their status would be in the colonies" (DeJean 59).

the mythologized founding mother that they want to believe in, and Hayden White would agree. He writes:

> Certain narrative discourses may have arguments embedded within them, in the form of explanations of why things happened as they did, set forth in the mode of direct address to the reader in the author's own voice and perceivable as such. But such arguments are more properly considered as a commentary on, rather than a part of, the narrative. In historical discourse, the narrative serves to transform into a story a list of historical events that would otherwise be only a chronicle. In order to effect this transformation, the events, agents, and agencies represented in the chronicle must be encoded as story elements; that is, they must be characterized as the kinds of events, agents, agencies, and so on, that can be apprehended as elements of specific story types. On this level of encodation, the historical discourse directs the reader's attention to a secondary referent, different in kind from the events that make up the primary referent[.] (43).

Proving White's point that historical data and stories do not always go hand in hand, Marcia Zug and Pamela Anne Quiroz do not believe in the French founding mothers as strong pioneering women (Zug 60). They liken *les filles du roi* and the Casket Girls to mail-order brides, stating that the women were sent to fulfill a specific purpose as demonstrated by the historical records.

In her article, "Normative Motherhood," Andrea O'Reilly cites Sharon Hays who talks about intensive mothering (which is almost identical to sacrificial motherhood) as saying:

> The ideology of intensive child rearing practices persists, in part, because it serves the interests of men but also capitalism, the state, the middle class and Whites. Further, and on a deeper level … the ideology of

> intensive mothering is protected and promoted because it holds a fragile but nonetheless, powerful cultural position as the last best defense against what many people see as the impoverishment of social ties, communal obligations, and unremunerated commitments (500).

In sending women to the new world, France may have spent 50 livres per woman for her dowry, but the investment reaped dividends in terms of reproducing France's influence in North America. Understanding these impacts uncovers the deeper currents that underlie the historical narratives of *les filles du roi* and the Casket Girls. These tales not only reflect certain historical facts or perceptions, but also offer a lens into the evolving societal attitudes and ideologies of the time. With this broader perspective in mind, I now turn attention to the upswing in nationalism in a world rapidly transforming due to globalization and technological advancements. This exploration will illuminate the connection between historical narratives, societal perceptions, and the rise of nationalism as a response to the changing global landscape.

Reshaping Identities in a Connected World

Quebec has long looked to France as its ancestral heritage. "[History] is an essential cultural factor in people's lives. One function of this cultural, public use of the past is to establish meaningful connections between the past and the present so as to shape people's sense of historical orientation, identity, and community-building over time" (Lévesque and Croteau 105).

In his book, *Passer à l'avenir*, Jocelyn Létourneau writes:

> À une époque où toutes les collectivités sentent le besoin de réactualiser leurs représentations globales pour faire face aux défis de la mondialisation et du pluralisme culturel, réexaminer le passé aux fins de la construction d'un avenir aussi heureux et viable que possible pour les contemporains et les descendants apparaît, à ceux qui ont le pouvoir et la

> responsabilité de faire sens du passé, comme rien de moins qu'une nécessité (11).

Here Létourneau gets at the heart of why folks may be so ardently looking towards their own pasts - the idea of wanting to belong somewhere specific when the world has become so vast and global in such a short amount of time.

As famously stated by Joseph Nye Jr, "Globalization has made national boundaries more porous but not irrelevant. Nor does globalization mean the creation of a universal community" (81). This phrase captures the current transnational moment. In a time when nations seek to establish relationships and partnerships across borders, people, ideas, and cultures migrate and circulate on an unprecedented scale, in large part thanks to technology and the rapid advancements that occurred as a result.[6] Indeed, we find ourselves in a postmodern, postfeminist, neoliberal period in which global boundaries and borders are rapidly disintegrating, and people are moving, shifting, and integrating into different lands and cultures, creating a global melting pot.

In an era marked by increasing globalization and rapid technological advancements, the dissemination of information has accelerated. This phenomenon has facilitated the exchange of stories, traditions, customs, and cultural elements on a global scale, effectively shrinking the perceived vastness of the world. As a consequence of this enhanced connectivity, access to products and cultural artifacts from distant regions has become readily accessible through online commerce. The once-distinctive characteristics of specific geographic regions have become accessible to a global audience, eroding the boundaries, both tangible and conceptual, that previously demarcated different cultural spheres. While the dichotomy of self and Other persists,

[6] One may think of the rapid advancements in the diffusion of knowledge with the advent of the Gutenberg printing press in 1540, or the acceleration of travel and industry with the introduction of trains in the Industrial Revolution.

it has undergone transformation, as the notion of "otherness" is now more proximate and can encompass a multiplicity of identities, often resulting in hybridized cultural expressions. This has, in turn, led to the emergence of new “imaginary” communities, formed around shared interests and globalized cultural influences, transcending traditional geographical constraints.

Nevertheless, does merely consuming the same products actually create a community? According to Benedict Anderson, yes. However, it creates a community that actively believes itself to be a part of said community. The imagined community sustains and upholds itself in a Cartesian way, meaning, it exists because it believes that it exists. At the same time the members of the community will have commonalities, serving to maintain the boundaries of the group and to define who exists within and without its confines. Anderson analyzes nationalism in his work, *Imagined Communities*. It was in this work that he created the concept of imagined communities. The nation exists fictionally, according to Anderson; it is imaginary, socially constructed, and seeks out the greatest number of members possible (34). Anderson asserts that imagined communities form as a result of print capitalism, gathering folks together who are able to read in a common language (34). In this way, readers within their respective cultures comprised one of the first imaginary communities.

Due to this rapid globalization and transnationalization there is a multiculturalism, or a deterritorialization, that occurs within and outside of traditional borders. Transnational movement occurs across both land and social platforms (i.e. the internet), and thereby different nations and communities arise in spaces which were once more clearly defined and delineated via religion, language, or culture, for example. While this generates enthusiasm among some, signifying expanded opportunities and cross-cultural exchange, others respond with apprehension and resistance. This reaction is particularly evident in segments of the population

driven by nationalist or white supremacist ideologies, who perceive globalization as a threat to traditional boundaries and cultural norms. These apprehensions echo neo-conservative ideals, generating backlash against this deterritorialization.[7] This backlash takes shape in the form of a desire to create stronger borders between countries–as in a wall, for example–or to create well-defined identities in one's origins, in order to concretely pinpoint to a solid definition of oneself and a community. This also serves to define oneself against another person or group, but most notably against the Other.

The Role of Motherhood in Nationalist Ideologies

Within this framework, there is a perceived need to protect reproduction as a means of preserving specific racial or cultural identities, consequently elevating the significance of motherhood as a focal point for efforts to manage societal change and protect perceived cultural values. Patrizia Albanese writes the following in her chapter, "Territorializing Motherhood" in *Maternal Theory* that "Craig Calhoun noted that nationalism is a distinctly gender-based ideology wherein family becomes the source of a nation's continuity in time and where men are seen as martyrs and women as mothers" (Albanese ch 50). Shari L. Thurer adds "One senses a stubborn feeling in the land that stay-at-home mothers will redeem family values and restore morality to our citizenry" (Thurer ch 20). It is the most moral and ethical women who are dignified enough to bear the nation's children. Only the best and the brightest will do, others need not apply. Albanese continues:

> The image of the prolific, chaste, and virtuous "national mother" is a strikingly common symbol across nations. Nationalists need women as

[7] Deterritorialization, as defined by Deleuze and Guattari, indicates a shifting of boundaries so that the original understanding of a place, or concept, shifts and changes, thus creating a new territory or boundary, and a new space in itself.

> mothers, as both symbols of the nation and actual cultural and biological reproducers of it. Traditional, patriarchal (highly gendered) images of women as mothers are central to the nationalist project of myth-making (the idea of the nation) and its actual biological continuity into the future (the "practice" of nation-making). Pure and virtuous mothers are believed–and expected–to reproduce the nation in body (blood/children/future nationals) and mind (preservation of past traditions, food and ritual, and "mother tongue," to name a few). Heterosexual women/mothers symbolize and are expected to preserve the nation's past, present and future (Ch 50).

Talking about mothers in Russia, Germany, and Italy in the 20th century, after major wars and conflicts, Albanese writes, "Women became the focus of nationalist attention because they were expected to be 'mothers of the nation,' reproducers of the ethnic self and cultural carriers. Women as mothers symbolized the nation's vulnerable existence at the hands of their ethnic nemesis but were also expected to secure its future glory" (Albanese ch 50). Quite a lot rides on the shoulders of mothers, and yet State support is not always as generous as the expectations it places on mothers. Albanese writes of nationalism and mothers:

> First off, nationalism, by its very nature, sanctions exclusion. It postulates the nation as a biological, self-perpetuating category of people which hinges upon the biological and ideological similarity of its members–after all the root of the word "nation" is the Latin verb *nasci*, meaning "to be born" (Albanese 1996: 187) and the use of the terms "motherland" and "fatherland" are intentional classificatory categories of kinship, and imply relational descent (Grosby 43). This similarity is often believed to be maintained by preserving its biological "purity,"

> uncontaminated by foreignness–the Other. The nation and nationalists preserve their rasion d'être by maintaining real or imaginary blood ties that are believed to solidify into concrete national boundaries (Albanese 1996: 187). As Robert Kaiser noted, "homelands do not come ready-made, but rather are the outcomes of the 'national construction of social space" (231). In other words, nationalism has a tendency to homogenize whoever/whatever is contained within these boundaries, superficially obscuring diversities that exist within (for example, social class differences and other inequities; also historically, religious and racial diversity (Albanese ch 50).

Nationalism reinforces boundaries, thus providing a sense of belonging and exclusion, providing more definitive lines for Anderson's imagined communities. Mothers help solidify and delineate communities by solidifying and delineating the nation in re/creating members of/for the nation and raising them in the culture and traditions that are a stead of the state.

Mainstream postfeminists and neoliberals support women remaining in traditional roles akin to a 1950's housewife. In fact, many of these same people argue that women trying to have, and be, it all is more detrimental to women than helpful, much like when time-saving devices started appearing in households and actually took time away from women. Being in the workforce does not mean that women are satisfied with their lives, because if anything, they are forced to take on more responsibility at both work and at home. Postfeminist literature like Diane Negra's *What A Girl Wants?* argues that when women are forced to slow down and go home to a small town, they find their roots and want to stay there with their family and loved ones.

Within the discourse of feminism and postfeminism, a familiar concern arises—how women risk losing their identities when they become mothers, often reduced to fulfilling the

maternal role in ways that may not align with their personal aspirations. Heilmann and Llewellyn write in their article, “Hystorical Fictions” that, “The danger is that in accepting the *status quo* or invoking the cause of ‘post-feminist’ political stage for women, feminists themselves also grant acceptance to a current position for women that does not build on the relinquishing of the oppression of the past, nor does it develop a positive imagining of the future. It leaves us aimlessly lost within an imperfect, post-modern, present” (3).That women love their roles as wives and mothers so much that they freely and willingly make the decision to stay at home and embrace these roles is reflective of a neoliberal trend in feminism. Coined by Catherine Rottenberg in her work *The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism*, the concept of neoliberal feminism places an emphasis on the work-family balance. It suggests that women can pursue their ambitions freely, provided that their foremost and paramount commitment remains their family (Banet-Weiser et al. 4). As one can see, the representation and positioning of women as mothers and caretakers are influenced by a complex interplay of feminist, postfeminist, and neoliberal ideologies. These perspectives offer insight into the contemporary notions surrounding women's choices and the societal expectations placed upon them.

The analysis of women's roles can be further contextualized through the lens of intersectionality and marginalized historical representation. Françoise Vergès’ theory about femonationalism and natality practices helps center the other founding mothers of North America who are relegated to secondary status. In the novels about the founding mothers, the white woman is the center of focus. Because it was the beginning of colonization, contact with people from other countries and cultures was new. Nevertheless, one must question the representation (or lack thereof) of non-white characters. Their relegation to secondary status in the novels keeps the Eurocentric frame of mind in power and focus on what is considered the current dominant

culture. As Eva Karpinski notes about Suzanne Desrochers' novel *Bride of New France* of a *fille du roi*:

> Nevertheless, in its limited attempt to expose the invisibility of poor white French women as agents of colonial history, the novel gestures toward historical fiction that is trying to resist the reductionism of simplistic essentialist approaches to history and identity as well as playful postmodernist relativism, relying instead on thick contextual description of social history, analysis of intersectional differences, and attention to the power of historical ideologies (191).

Adrienne Rich, in her work *Of Woman Born*, discerns two facets of motherhood: one relates to an individual woman's relationship with her reproductive capabilities and children, while the other concerns the institution that historically aimed to ensure women's potential and autonomy remained under male control (13). Rich's observations illuminate the multi-dimensional nature of motherhood. In the context of this dissertation, we examine the institutions that govern motherhood within the realm of the State.

The mother is a prominent and visible figure who is able to be controlled by the State due to her reproductive capacities. It is easy to manipulate the mother and mothering, as it is often considered an "inherent" biological feature of women. Culture and media normalize mothering and motherhood, while society writ large grooms girls from a young age to both want children, and to have the expectation that they will one day have them. There is almost no room for girls to think or believe that they would not, or might not, be mothers in the future. Motherhood is merely another step along the "traditional," – and stereotypical – path of life: childhood, adolescence, and adulthood (which may or may not include higher education or marriage). Whether the young woman decides to immediately have children (or may already have

one/some), the likelihood that she has children is high, and there is a lot of pressure for her to do so. As her children grow up, she helps repeat the cycle by encouraging her children to get married and have children so that she can have grandchildren. This kind of cultural embedding means that the state has to put forth little effort to continue the cycle. Before this cycle existed, the state did have to exert effort in order to keep the population stable and growing, especially if it wanted to sustain overseas colonies. Such is the case of France in the 17th and 18th centuries.

State control over its citizens' bodies is not a new concept, though learning about the various manifestations of its codification and legislation on different bodies during different eras can feel new. The French state did just this in the 17th and 18th centuries with their, sometimes less fortunate, female population. In an effort to build New France and Louisiana, the French state sent women to the colonies to become the wives and mothers that were needed there. The women were used as reproductive human capital. As Carol Mossman writes, "If reproduction is a political issue because, quite simply, that is how live bodies are furnished to the State, it also entertains a symbolic relation to politics as well" (14). And as Catherine Rottenberg writes, "In neoliberal rationalism, people are 'human capital' consisting of ungendered productive units-yet for the neoliberal system to be sustainable, women must also play a reproductive role by creating future workers" (x).

Shaping Bodies for State Purposes

In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault talks about the body of a soldier in the early seventeenth century as being a "formless clay" (135). This body is defined as malleable and able to perform in specific and desired ways after it has been acted upon and trained through discipline. As a result of the discipline and repeated practice of the movements, the peasant becomes a soldier (135). Expected to marry and use their bodies to produce children for France,

les filles du roi and the Casket Girls were expected to fall in line with their role, as much as any man performing his job or duty to the Crown. Often coming from the Salpêtrière or *hôpitaux généraux*, the women would have received a disciplined training in a skill (often sewing or embroidery), as well as religious teachings. In this way, the women were being molded by the state to act in ways beneficial to the state's mission and to blend seamlessly into society, much like Foucault's soldiers. Foucault also writes, "On almost every occasion [the political processes of subjugating the body] were adopted in response to particular needs: an industrial innovation, a renewed outbreak of certain epidemic diseases, the invention of the rifle or the victories of Prussia" (138). In the case of the women in question here, their bodies responded to the need to reproduce France on the North American continent and to tame the men they were to marry for the Crown's economic benefit.

As Butler shows via Foucault's *History of Sexuality* volumes, sexuality can be defined, "as a socially constructed instrument of power" (37). Given this idea of bodies being used for state purposes, we can now take the bodies of the women sent over to be the founding mothers and classify what kind of bodies they could be considered. As we will see, Foucault's concept of the "docile body" serves as a starting point for understanding these women's bodies in the historical context, allowing us to propose a contemporary interpretation of their bodies. In order to do so, I explore contemporary historical fictions in Quebec, Louisiana, and New Orleans that depict these historical personages, and based on the literature, I ascribe different body types to them. I propose the following classifications (and will delve into further detail in each chapter): les filles du roi as the honored body, the romantic vein of the Casket Girls as the romantic body, and the Southern Gothic vein of the Casket Girls as the defiant and monstrous body.

I would also like to propose a connection between Foucault's concept of discipline and Ricœur's discussion of *Theaetetus* in his *Memory, History, Forgetting*. In his discussion regarding wax as a medium for holding an impression Ricœur cites Socrates as saying:

> We make impressions upon this of everything we wish to remember [*mnēmoneusai*] among the things we have seen or heard or thought of ourselves; we hold the wax under our perceptions and thoughts and take a stamp from them, in the way in which we take the imprints [marks, *semeia*] of signet rings. Whatever is impressed upon the wax we remember and know so long as the image [*eidolon*] remains in the wax; whatever is obliterated or cannot be impressed, we forget [*epilelēsthai*] and do not know (191d) (9).

Ricœur's discussion sounds similar to Foucault's discussion of discipline in that the docile bodies learn an action and repeat it until it becomes muscle memory and imprinted on, or perhaps in, the body. The disciplined body is able to carry memory within it, and perhaps we can say that the bodies descended from the Founding Mothers carry memories – original or created – in them as well. Jocelyn Létourneau writes, "While it is clear that meaning is at least in part passed on from generation to generation – that is, that the heritage of the past objectively marks the present even when it is not subjectively adopted by the descendants – this meaning is nevertheless itself transformed to meet new needs, unforeseeable by the ancestors, that arise in building the present" (14).

The Ongoing Struggle for Bodily Autonomy

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* has received renewed attention in the wake of the Roe v. Wade overturn. Women dress up as the handmaids in the novel at protests or change their profile pictures on social media as commentary that folks with uteruses are not in charge of

their own bodily autonomy so long as the government legislates their bodies. In an interview with Dr. Melissa Harris-Perry on "The Takeaway," Dr. Deborah Gray White says:

> I remember watching *The Handmaid's Tale* with my daughters and listening to people say and reading the commentary that this is dystopian. I said, no, no, this is not dystopian. This is American history because, of course, we have women who have absolutely no autonomy and even women who have a little bit of control over what they can do and they can't, but what they can do and even what they can think most of the women are under the heavy hand of a patriarchy and a government that does not recognize their personal integrity (Harris-Perry).

This is not the first time in the history of the North American continent in which a government has used women for their reproductive abilities. As previously mentioned, the French government, through two different programs in the 17th and 18th centuries, sent women to marry and bear the children of the Frenchmen already established in the colony.

In an interview with Dr. Melissa Harris-Perry on, "The Takeaway" Dr. Deborah Gray White discusses the economic reasons, and benefits, for the State to force enslaved Black women to reproduce. She says, "When we're talking about women being compelled to have sex, and compelled to have children, we're certainly talking about, and particularly when it was in the economic interests of slave owners because a slave child was profitable at birth, a slave infant was worth something monetarily." "Because women are counters of exchange between men, their bodies have an almost entirely abstract value. The bodies of women are thus, in a sense, absent in the story; they are almost never described in any telling detail" (Hunt 7).

While it is impossible to make a direct comparison between enslaved Black women and the French women brought over to the colonies, as their lived experiences are very different,

there are some similarities that can be noted at the governmental level. For instance, the governments that sought to enrich their wealth in North America instituted programs and laws designed to take away bodily autonomy from the women. The French government encouraged young white women of marriageable age and birthing years to do just that: marry and give birth to children. Black women in the United States were considered property and had no legal rights to their bodies and were forced to use their bodies to the benefit and profit of others. Both sets of women were used to create future workers, and in several of the novels analyzed in this dissertation, this particular representation of women bearing future workers persists. In Gretchen Craig's second novel in her *New Hope* series, *What We May Be*, she describes the procuration of an enslaved woman who recently had a baby who passed away. Her enslaved man Thomas says, "'She's got a bad foot and won't ever be any good in the fields, so nobody will buy her. The broker might let her go cheap" and then later, "'Then let's go buy us a wet nurse'" (94).

The 2022 decision by the U.S. Supreme Court to overturn the 1973 landmark Roe v. Wade case, which protects a woman's right to have an abortion, and thus, bodily autonomy, has reinvigorated discussions regarding a woman's right to choose. This decision has been felt within the U.S., but also has received attention around the world. Women are once again forced to reckon with, and fight for, control over their own bodies, as they seemingly now belong to the government, at the state level – or even simply, to the State[8]. After almost five decades of espousing girl power and advancing feminist causes such as equality in the workplace, Title IX, the Violence Against Women Act, feminists are back to fighting for the right to their own bodies.

[8] The use of the word "State" with a capital S implies the governing body/institution which oversees citizens of both the state and the country. "state" with a lowercase S implies the individual state itself. Thus, even as states are able to decide their own laws regarding women's reproductive health care, ultimately the decision is one made by the State as it holds the power to make such decisions.

The regulation at the intersection of biology and politics, or biopolitics, is not always clear-cut and simple. As Thomas Lemke illustrates in his work, *Biopolitics: An Advanced Introduction*, biopolitics can range anywhere from laws governing human populations to scientific advancements with human genetics. Lemke shows how several theorists, such as Foucault, Agamben, Hardt, and Negri, approach biopolitics, its history, and current implications.

Foucault describes biopolitics in several different ways, and does not adhere to a singular, consistent definition, according to Lemke (34). In one instance, however, Lemke describes Foucault's understanding as that it "stands for a constellation in which modern human and natural sciences and the normative concepts that emerge from them structure political action and determine its goals" (33). He later adds, "Foucault distinguishes 'two basic forms' of this power over life: the disciplining of the individual body and the regulatory control of the population" (36). My use of the term "biopolitics" follows Foucault's definition: biopolitics is the governmental control over its population incentivized by programs which ultimately benefit the government, and the withholding or dissemination of information done so as a means to control the citizenry.

Lemke writes:

> The disciplinary technology to supervise and control the individual body had already emerged in the 17th century. This "anatomo-politics of the human body" (ibid.) conceives of the human body as a complex machine. Rather than repressing or concealing, it works by constituting and structuring perceptual grids and physical routines. In contrast to more traditional forms of domination such as slavery or serfdom, discipline allows for the increase of the economic productivity of the body, while at the same time weakening its forces to assure political

subjection. It is exactly this coupling of economic and political imperatives that define discipline and establish its status as a technology:

> The historical moment of the disciplines was the moment when an art of the human body was born, which was directed not only at the growth of its skills, nor at the intensification of its subjection, but at the formation of a relation that in the mechanism itself makes it more obedient as it becomes more useful, and conversely. (Foucault 1977, 137–138) (36).

Lemke then goes on to further describe disciplines, saying, "Disciplines developed inside of institutions, such as the army, prisons, schools, and hospitals, whereas the state organized and centralized the regulation of the population from the 18th century on" (37). Adding to this idea of institutions and discipline, Adrienne Rich writes, "Like his predecessors of fifty and a hundred and more years ago, Hampshire sees society as threatened when women begin to choose the terms of their lives. Patriarchy could not survive without motherhood and heterosexuality in their institutional forms" (43). Indeed, New France and Louisiana could also not survive without motherhood and heterosexuality, which is why the French crown developed programs to ensure the success of the colonies.

Summary

As the feminist adage goes, "the political is personal." Thus the novels analyzed in this dissertation underscore the intersections of female representation, feminism, and historical fiction as part of a feminist project. I will demonstrate how the romance novel and postfeminism often inform and complement each other, both espousing the independence of the woman and her ability to make choices as an autonomous being in an idealized world. While it may appear that romance novels and postfeminism champion women's independence, one must acknowledge their limitations, particularly for the many women who do not fit the mold of privilege, often

excluded due to their economic and racial backgrounds. Jess Butler has written an article entitled, "For White Girls Only? Postfeminism and the Politics of Inclusion" in which she argues that postfeminism is a "neoliberal discursive formation" which "privileges a white middle-class, heterosexual subject" (35). Butler writes that Catharine MacKinnon, "contends that since women are constructed as objects for male pleasure from the start, the call for women's sexual freedom renders their objectification invisible and further naturalizes their oppression" (38-39). Women and nature are often paired together as synonymous beings, heightening the "naturalness" of both.

Catherine Rottenberg's argument complements Butler's. Professor Ruth O'Brien writes in the foreward to Rottenberg's book, *Neoliberal Feminism*:

> In recent years feminism has seen a resurgence in the popular media, with celebrities proudly declaring themselves feminists and bestselling books teaching women how to shatter the glass ceiling without neglecting their families. In this book, however, Catherine Rottenberg shows us how such 'neoliberal feminism' forsakes the vitally important goals of emancipation and social justice, substitutes positive affect for genuine change, and adopts the theory and often the very language of neoliberalism-which, in turn, needs feminism in order to resolve its own internal contradictions (ix).

The following chapters explore questions about women and motherhood, the representation of *les filles du roi* and the Casket Girls via literature, and their connotations in contemporary culture. This dissertation seeks not only to show the connection between North American Francophone communities, but also to take a feminist and postfeminist look at the French Founding Mothers via contemporary cultural productions. It is important to tell these stories, because the truth of history is – or can be – lost in overly romanticized historical fictions. These women are depicted as those who came over to the New World in the search for true love,

adventure and of their own agency. The analysis will uncover interconnected themes, illuminating the often-overlooked agency and roles of the women who have been marginalized in historical narratives and political systems.

Each chapter summary below offers insight into my analysis of these founding mothers in their respective colonial contexts and across literary genres.

Chapter 1 - Mother as honorable nation: les filles du roi in Québec

This chapter looks at the concept of honor as gendered, as well as the elevation of maintaining one's convictions, and, above all, the redemption women find in caring for children. Sergine Desjardins' novel, *Marie Major*, exalts her ancestor, the eponymous character, Marie, depicting a strong mother, capable of taking care of her family in difficult times, while also standing strongly and firmly in her beliefs and morals.

As Bill Marshall states, "'Nation' and 'identity' are ever provisional, historically contingent, ceaselessly elaborated constructions, and yet at some level they are inescapable" (Marshall 2). The relationship that Quebec has traditionally held with the concept of nation and nationhood has been laced with tension. One of the ways in which Quebec understands itself is via certain mythological or tropic figures: lumberjacks, strong central mothers, the town priest, or a family of 15 children, for example. Given the history of the founding of the modern nation, certain folklores persist in the collective memory and popular culture of the people.[9] To understand the historical narrative in Quebec there is a need to understand its history and traditions.

When Céline Dion sings, "je descends de l'hiver et des filles du roi" there is a richly encoded cultural and historical background that persists and also *resists* narratives that would

[9] The tension noted here is from the perception that Quebec has never been recognized as a "distinct society" or founding nation within Canada. Novels such as Hugh MacLennan's *Two Solitudes* are a fictionalized representation of the tenuous relationship and cultural isolation felt between English and French speakers in Canada's history.

change the long-held perception of the people and their history. The cultural tension in Quebec shifts in the 1960s during *La Révolution Tranquille*, a time of rapid modernization and liberalization within the province. While this Quiet Revolution helped bring Quebec squarely into the 20th century, many vestiges of looking back towards the past as a method of understanding oneself remains. What we see today is an ever-present push and pull between past and present.

Chapter 2 - Mother as hope: Romanticized Casket Girls in Louisiana

When one imagines the French Founding Mothers in 18th century Louisiana, it is easy to romanticize the valiant women chosen for their virtues and skills to reproduce France in Louisiana as opposed to imprisoned women with no hope for a future or with restricted social mobility and limited options for a better life. This is precisely what some authors, such as Gretchen Craig, have done. Erased and ignored are the realities of the men and women who were forced to come to Louisiana in an effort to rid Paris of its unwanted prisoners and provide human capital for the colony, but exalted are those fictional characters who we need to believe in. While the facts can be murky, perhaps only 28 women can be considered *filles à la cassette*, or Casket Girls, and yet several romance novels on these women exist.

Janice Radway's writes the following in the introduction to her book, "In the end, *Reading the Romance* argues that romance reading is a profoundly conflicted activity centered upon a profoundly conflicted form" (14). Radway notices the conflict in the genre and states unequivocally that she is unable to resolve it in her work. While romance novels do, or can, have positive, affirming, and empowering aspects for women, it also continually reinscribes them into a stylized, and idealized depiction of their oppression. Moreover, the desire to believe one is

descended from a select population whose goal was to recreate the Old World in the New World does lend a certain sense of otherness, of being special.

As this chapter will show, this is also the case with the romance novels regarding the Casket Girls. Gretchen Craig's two-novel, *New Hope*, series embraces the idea that love conquers all, and that there is no boundary too great that love cannot overcome. Yet despite some of the happily-ever-afters that occur in this series, there is also much pain and heartbreak whose reality is softened or glossed over as easily resolved, lending an air of incredulity to the novels, and the characters end up in prescribed, predetermined heteronormative roles, thus carrying out the task of the State.

Chapter 3 - Mother as in-between: absent, destructive, and undead in New Orleans

Historical romance novels are not the only genre to embrace the story of the Casket Girls in Louisiana. The Southern Gothic embraces New Orleans and its lore and culture of vampires to create its own unique literary fusion. New Orleans speaks to a multiplicity of identities and ethnicities. The Mississippi River runs down the Eastern side of Louisiana and New Orleans opens up into Lake Pontchartrain, which then opens up to the Gulf of Mexico. The river in addition to the port made the area invaluable to trade and travel. As an essential hub, New Orleans saw the arrival of a variety of folks, from the Caribbean (of which some consider it a part or extension), Africa, and Europe; some who came by choice, others who came by force. Combined with the already existing Indigenous population, the region is known for its diversity. This multiplicity shows itself in Arden's works, which encompass a plurality of stories, folklores, and traditions.

In combination with the Southern Gothic genre is the Young Adult genre of literature. Much like the travelers looking to find a place in the world, so do young adults. And more than

young adults read and enjoy YA literature. As Antero Garcia notes, "...young adult fiction drives cultural engagement for a large portion of literate America" (3). This may speak to a larger question of finding oneself, one's place in the world, and one's origins, albeit without the guidance of a mother, which are larger questions in Arden's series. This novel seeks to investigate representations of mothers who either are not mothers, or are not present, thus presenting the in-between mother: Mother Nature, vampires, and Brigitte.

Together, these novels offer a broad, varied view of the representation of women as mothers in contemporary North American communities.

CHAPTER 1

Mother as honorable nation: *les filles du roi* in Québec

"Moi, je descends de l'hiver

et des filles du roi

et je veux ma famille autour de moi,

je nous aime à l'étroit"

Céline Dion, "Je nous veux"

The opening line of the prologue of the novel, *Marie Major* by Sergine Desjardins is, "La vie est si fragile" (16), highlighting the delicateness of life and how one decision can change the course of future events. While this phrase may seem clichéd, its inclusion serves a profound purpose by setting a tone of fragility and vulnerability. It suggests that even the smallest choices can have profound consequences. Desjardins further explores the butterfly effect in the first chapter, saying, "Tel le battement d'ailes d'un papillon, les plus infimes décisions peuvent changer une destinée, car c'est en répondant à cette si tentante invite qu'Antoine traça le cours tragique de sa destinée" (21). The butterfly effect, rooted in chaos theory by Edward Lorenz and inspired by Ray Bradbury's "A Sound of Thunder," underscores the idea that minor actions can lead to significant future outcomes. In starting the story by declaring that life is so fragile, and incorporating the butterfly effect, Desjardins suggests that something as small as a bullet can – and has – drastically change the course of lives, not just of a few people, but many. Desjardins' choice to begin her narrative in this way hints at a deeper message: the interconnectedness of all things. It suggests that seemingly trivial events, like the flap of a butterfly's wings, can send ripples through time and space, shaping the destinies of individuals and communities alike. This concept becomes relevant when considering the legacy of *les filles du roi*. With over 20 million

descendants from *les filles du roi*, or founding mothers of Quebec, according to the Geneanet website, one wonders what other effects may have occurred from this history (Daly).

Society's fascination with the mother figure offers an entry for inquiry into Quebec's *filles du roi*. Mothers are revered for the role they fill and the children they raise, a role often viewed as pivotal and natural to women. In some Western cultures, mothers are often held to the expectation of raising future upstanding citizens, with their children becoming blank slates upon which society at large can place their hopes and expectations. In the context of Quebec, the French founding mothers of New France, "les filles du roi," hold a unique and revered status. They are celebrated as the birthing figures of a nation that has evolved into contemporary Quebec. Sergine Desjardins' novel, *Marie Major*, is one such cultural production that weaves together history, cultural mythology, and collective identity to illuminate the life of one *fille du roi* and her experience in the colony.

Gerard Bouchard, in his book, *Social Myths and Collective Imaginaries*, talks about *les filles du roi* in terms of the concept of anchors. Dormant anchors are founding myths that exist, but have not yet firmly taken hold in the collective imagination, unlike active anchors such as the landing of the *Mayflower*, which is seen as a symbol of resistance and persistence against a tyrannical government (52). Bouchard acknowledges *les filles du roi* as a positive dormant anchor that has been reappropriated as, "a new narrative with feminist overtones" (52).

In essence, the fragile interconnectedness of life, as symbolized by the butterfly effect, resonates not only in the individual destinies by *les filles du roi,* but also in the broader narrative of Quebec's history, collective imaginary, and culture. Mothers, both as individual caretakers and as collective symbols, serve as vessels for societal aspirations and the transmission of cultural values. The story of *les filles du roi* demonstrates how the choices of a few have shaped

the destiny of many, and contribute to the complex tapestry of Quebec's continued and continuing identity.

Embedded within *Marie Major* is a richly encoded story that touches upon elements of what have previously been considered a foundational Quebec identity, playing into a specific cultural mythology. Gerard Bouchard's definition of myths as "key elements of collective imaginaries, arising from a socio-cultural dynamic rife with power dynamics, divisions, conflicts, and contradictions," lays the groundwork for my exploration (4).

Thesis Statement

This chapter looks at *les filles du roi*, a group of women sent by Louis XIV between 1663 and 1673 to New France to marry in, and to populate, the North American colony. As the appointed founding mothers of the Quebec nation, the contemporary role of *les filles du roi* seems to be one of valorization for their descendants, in order to instill a sense of appreciation and inspiration for the trials and tribulations these women faced to lay the bedrock for what is now contemporary Quebec. Using a general framework of power, mythology, and identity, which will be further examined, I aim to analyze the use of *les filles du roi,* and the founding mother trope in *Marie Major* to highlight the ambiguity and ambivalence of female representation in the novel. The novel evokes questions of the roles of religion and reproductive choice in a woman's life, the fairness of the judicial system and pursuit of the truth for men and women, the concept of justice, and the construction of class and social hierarchy. Underlining each of these questions is the theme of honor and its importance in individuals and society, then and now. In analyzing these themes and ideas, it becomes evident that the perplexity and ambiguity in *Marie Major* may not solely be a reflection of the historical past, but could also

resonate with contemporary Quebec. The interplay between religion, autonomy, and societal expectations remains relevant, raising questions about how the past informs the present.

To illustrate the assertion of the ambiguity and ambivalence of women in the novel, I propose the following layout of the chapter: a contextualization of the novel to be examined in this chapter, a summary of the work that has already been written on the novel, an examination of Gerard Bouchard's work on cultural mythology and collective identity to understand how myths play a fundamental part in society's understanding of itself, analyses looking at the concept of honor as a tool of patriarchal control and how it maintains a conservative cultural practice, despite seeming liberal, and finally, feminist analyses to understand the representation of the two principal female characters and their relationship to children, mothering and motherhood.

Perhaps the confusion and ambiguity mentioned above say more about Quebec today than Quebec of the past. Jerome De Groot writes in his theoretical work, *The Historical Novel*, "the use of creative forms to conceptualise, question and simply present history is a fundamental cultural practice" (12). As Frederic Jameson shows in his work, *The Political Unconscious,* there are traces of real problems that are subconsciously embedded within cultural productions. He argues that every work is political in nature, containing a message that the cultural critic needs to decipher. Indeed, *Marie Major* offers more than a story of a 17th century woman who loses her husband, Antoine, to adultery and is forced to raise their child on her own while navigating a burgeoning society and its complex social hierarchy.

These cultures, deeply rooted in the past, cast a wide net of responsibility, reaching far beyond the actions of individuals to encompass the deeds of their ancestors. In such honor-bound societies, individuals can be held responsible for actions that were not intentional or even for

actions committed by relatives, ancestors, or other members of their group (Sommers 6). Following the revelation of Antoine's infidelity and his subsequent demise, Marie, Anne, and Julien navigate the repercussions in distinctive ways. Anne mourns the loss of her lover, Antoine, and accepts her sentencing, Julien seeks to evade indictment for Antoine's murder and flees to Europe, while Marie shoulders the onerous task of settling creditors, raising their son, rebuilding her life from the ground up, and confronting the criticisms and judgments of those who perceive her as an inadequate wife.

The emphasis on honor in *Marie Major* serves as a poignant backdrop against which we can critique the patriarchal control of women's behavior. The societal perception of honor was intricately intertwined with notions of female virtue and morality. Women were often held to a stringent standard of honor, their actions scrutinized, and their reputations fiercely guarded. In this light, honor acted as a double-edged sword, bestowing recognition upon virtuous conduct while simultaneously subjecting women to strict codes of behavior that limited and restricted their agency. As such, the concept of honor can be seen as a tool wielded by patriarchy to exert control over women's lives, constraining their choices and perpetuating traditional gender roles. It is then not surprising to see female authors write against this, by writing women into history as agents of their own choices and not as passive players in history.

Traditionally, the cornerstone of history and of historical fiction has focused on great men: their wars, their politics, their legacies. Over time, however, women have been migrating into the spotlight, with their stories beginning to take up more space as they move from the private to the public sphere. Novels about the founding mothers highlight intersections between gender, politics, and how women have both navigated and shaped this space. Given the valorization of the mother as central in the Quebec family, the new desire for *her*story, the place

of different contemporary feminisms in telling women's stories, it is fitting that there exists new literature about the French founding mothers in New France, their participation in and influence in shaping the burgeoning nation, and the indelible mark they have left for posterity.

Desjardins' novel is different from other historical fiction novels about *les filles du roi* in that it does not paint a rosy picture of their lives.[10] It details a difficult existence, principally, of two couples/families whose lives have been forever changed by a love affair and an assassination. Typically, stories about *les filles du roi* focus on the lives of one, or three, women, circulating through the characters' lives like a soap opera, sharing the best parts, denoting their courage for making the trans-Atlantic trek, and for highlighting immense courage in the face of a new environment. The stories usually end with a happily-ever-after, or a positive nod to the future and a promise of strong, lasting bonds of friendship with their fellow *filles du roi*.

Marie Major takes a decidedly different turn, focusing on illustrating strength in the face of adversity. The positive moments in the book tend to be small gestures with big impacts: neighbors providing a basket of food when Marie's house is seized, Pierre finding an apprenticeship and receiving room and board, a smiling child, a kiss between Marie and her faithful lover, a family welcoming Marie into their home when she is temporarily experiencing homelessness and in need. These instances underscore the idea that life is shaped by the small actions between community members. Acts of kindness resonate, creating a ripple effect akin to karma, where positive actions reverberate and negative deeds, exemplified by Julien, the betrayed husband and assassin, yield negative consequences.

[10] For other examples of novels written about *les filles du roi*, see the following: Aimee K Runyan's *Duty to the Crown*, and *Promised to the Crown*, Suzanne Desrochers' *Bride of New France*, Colette Piat's series *Les Filles du Roi*, and Nicole Macé's *Marie Carduner, fille du roy*.

Andrea Cabajsky and Brett Josef Grubisic draw upon Lukács in the introduction to their edited volume on historical fictions in Canada to define historical fiction as a genre that prompts readers to recognize their daily reality as the fulfillment of pivotal events from the past. They write, "In *The Historical Novel*, Lukács defines historical fiction in paradoxical terms: as a genre that encourages readers to recognize their quotidian reality as the fulfillment of foundational events, encounters, or moments in the past; and a genre that remains elusive, for it possesses no formal or thematic features to differentiate it from other kinds of novels" (vii-viii). Cabajsky and Grubisic then note that Lukács is not the first, nor only, person to highlight the paradoxical and ambiguous nature of the historical novel for its simultaneous focus on real events, and lack of formal elements. In the prologue to his own historical fiction regarding a *fille du roi* ancestor, *The Allards: Book One, The New World,* Wilmont Kreis writes, "I hope not only to tell the names and vital statistics of these people, but also who they were and why they did what they did, perhaps giving some insight into who we are and why" (kindle). The real link and connection to the past is used, by folks such as Kreis, to understand where we come from, and why we do what we do, and why we are who we are. People look to the past to help them make sense of the present, and *les filles du roi* can help us understand what it is to be a woman under governmental and societal constraints and influences.

The historical fiction genre serves to further underscore and highlight the ambivalence and ambiguity of *les filles du roi.* As we will see, Antoine is adulterous and still lauded after his death by his wife, mistress, child, and friends, with his ending being described as "tragique," even also in the title of the book. Julien killed his wife's lover in cold blood and was still able to court enough favor to escape punishment and return to Europe. Whereas for Marie and Anne,

they were both criticized for their actions and labeled, respectively, as either unpleasing to her husband, or wicked due to an extramarital affair.

Contextualization and History of the Novel, Marie Major

Marie Major is a novel, set in the late 17th century around 1670, written in 55 chapters in the present tense, along with a prologue and an epilogue. The story is told by various characters, through dialogue and inner monologue. The story of *Marie Major* encompasses the fictionalized story of Marie Major[11], but it also includes stories of other affected characters in the overarching narrative. The full title of the novel is, *Marie Major: Roman historique inspiré de la vie d'une Fille du roi dont l'époux, Antoine Roy dit Desjardins, fut assassiné.* The 415-page novel reads as a literary soap opera, with each chapter jumping to the plot of a different character, focusing on their specific situation. The work is written as if the reader is also present in the late 17th century with the characters. The third person omnipotent narrator makes the reader feel as if they are experiencing everything as the characters do, almost like an invisible ghost living and learning alongside the characters, with an intimate view into their thoughts. Much of the novel is motivated narration; meaning that what the reader reads—often in dialogues between the characters—is written, not for the benefit of the characters, but for the reader, in order to understand the customs and norms of late 17th century New France.

Literature about *les filles du roi* in Quebec trends toward historical fiction and biographical accounts. *Marie Major* is a historical fiction about the ancestor of the author.

[11] Silvio Dumas, Peter Gagné, and Yves Landry all include biographical repertoires in the works. They have each included detailed information on Marie Major, the ancestor of the author. Interestingly, the recorded lived experience of Marie Major is dissimilar to the fictionalized story in this novel. Notably, the real Marie did not know how to sign her name, while the fictionalized Marie was well versed in literature and writing. Records also show that Marie and Antoine lived with Julien Talua and Anne Godeby in Talua's house and did not have their own home. To know Marie's actual lived experience illustrates and underscores a highly motivated fictionalization and utilization as a literary tool for this novel of the principle character. For more information on the real Marie Major, please see the appendix of this dissertation.

Inspired by her genealogy and a love of history to write a novel about the life of her ancestor, a *fille du roi*, Marie Major, Sergine Desjardins created, *Marie Major,* a story about perseverance, longevity, and honor. *Marie Major* was initially published in 2006 by Guy Saint-Jean Éditeur, a small publishing house established in 1981 in Québec City, and later reedited by Québec Loisirs and France Loisirs (Radio-Canada). In 2013, *Marie Major* won the very first Prix littéraire international independent Marguerite Yourcenar.[12] Currently touting a special 15th anniversary edition, the novel has been described by *Nuit blanche*, a Quebec journal dedication to literary publications in French, wherein French language literature from Quebec occupies a central role, as one which, "fait honneur à la famille des romans historiques. Bien construit, émouvant, persuasif" (Saint-Jean Éditeur). The novel became the basis for an episode of the *Canada en Amour* series, thereby opening the French language story to a wider audience, both in television and language.

In an insightful chapter on Aimée Laberge's novel, *Les femmes du fleuve*, Cynthia Sugars explores the theme of genealogy and roots in historical fiction. Sugars delves into the narrative's exploration of personal quests for origins and the accompanying anxieties. She asserts, "Indeed, genealogy represents a particular version of the quest for origins, which can be applied on both an individual and collective level. The frequent invocations of national identity, maturity, and/or inheritance, which imply some notion of psychobiological continuity, tap into this desire for and anxiety about origins" (22). While Marie herself is not on a quest for her origins, her descendants and the novel's author, Sergine Desjardins, embark on this journey. Desjardins employs the novel as a means to reach back in time and connect with her ancestor, Marie, and to explore,

[12] According to the description in the Radio-Canada article that covered this award, the prize is given to an author by an Italian literary agency for a work published in French, Italian or Spanish, in France, Italy, Spain or Mexico, preferably by a smaller publisher, in order to offer international visibility to the author. The prize also comes with a small remuneration of €500 and an additional €2500 for promotional purposes (Radio-Canada).

"l'Histoire qui dévoile les mœurs, les croyances et les mentalités qui modulent le quotidien de gens moins connus certes, mais tout aussi importants et intéressants" (13).

Marie Major is a novel that not only contains extensive research, but also taps into the collective memory and imagination of Quebec. It offers an intimate portrayal of the lives of two *filles du roi*, the eponymous character, Marie, and the adulterer, Anne. As Amos Funkenstein writes in his 1989 article, "Collective Memory and Historical Consciousness," "[c]ollective memory, by contrast, is shallow in terms of chronology; it is completely topocentric. In the collective memory of the past, people, events, and historic institutions serve as prototypes and are not recognized for their uniqueness. They are links in an ongoing past" (9). Funkenstein links the past and the present as an ongoing continuum, and a chronology unbroken by time or generation, because the collective memory of the historical event serves a purpose in the present. Marie lived 350 years ago, yet this does not matter as her story is topocentric, as Funkenstein says. Her lived experiences as a mother, a widow, a curious student of medicine who becomes a midwife, as someone at odds with the Church, as someone who lives with an already existing native population makes her story easily transferable to the present Quebec lived experience.

Prominent historians such as Gustave Lanctôt, Yves Landry, and Silvio Dumas have made significant contributions to the study of *les filles du roi*, providing foundational research. Dumas, in his 1972 work *Les filles du roi en Nouvelle-France*, astutely noted, "La vie des « filles du roi » en Nouvelle-France est un sujet intéressant qui n'a pratiquement pas été étudié ni mis en évidence" (5). Within literary and cultural studies, these women have been given limited attention, partly due to entrenched preconceptions, including the enduring stereotypes of these women as either prostitutes or idealized mothers. Nevertheless, while their pioneering work laid

the groundwork, it is crucial to acknowledge that their perspectives were inevitably shaped by the social and intellectual context of their times.

Notably, it is important to recognize that the existing historical information on *les filles du roi* primarily originates from male historians who were writing during a more conservative era. However, the emergence of female researchers and authors, such as Aimie Runyan, Sergine Desjardins, Colette Piat, Julie Isaac, and Nicole Macé, marks a modern feminist reclamation of this history. For the first time, women are delving into the histories of *les filles du roi* and crafting narratives about their lived experiences. This reclamation of *les filles du roi*'s history directly addresses historical erasure and silencing in various facets of society, such as literature, history, and culture and gives them a new contemporary female voice. The writings of these authors help construct a more comprehensive understanding of the lives, struggles, and contributions of *les filles du roi*, and expand their visibility within the Quebec cultural landscape and conversations.

Cultural Mythology and Collective Identity

Collective imaginary and honor are two concepts that can play an interrelated role in shaping cultural norms and values. Collective imaginaries and honor can also be considered mediums that share and promote what is considered acceptable or desirable within a particular culture. The relationship between the two can be complex, reinforced and sustained by history and foundational myths of a society. For example, part of the Quebec imaginary has been the idea of a people who resist those who would seek to dominate and oppress them. To this end, Quebec has held two referendums for their collective independence from Canada. One of the reasons for the invigorated fight for independence is the history that Quebec has had with England during its foundation and formative years. The British Conquest of 1759 looms large in

the mind of some who uphold the idea of an oppressed Quebec. This cultural memory is a dominant anchor, previously mentioned, by Gerard Bouchard, in the Quebec collective imaginary.

What does it mean for a group of women to hold such an ambiguous place in a collective imaginary? Is it that their roles or identity are not clearly defined or understood within the larger societal narrative? The ambiguity can arise for a variety of reasons, for example the marginalization of certain groups in society, the erasure of their identity and contributions, or even the misunderstanding or lack of information surrounding them. The ambiguity can lead to a sense of invisibility or exclusion (and perhaps even the active invisibilization) of the group, however it can also lead to opportunities to resurrect and reshape narratives about the group, thereby offering greater visibility and recognition. This place of ambiguity, while challenging, can also be a site of resistance, and the authors who undertake the subject of *les filles du roi* as their subjects can reshape public perception.

Gerard Bouchard writes of cultural mythology and *les filles du roi that*:

> Dormant or developing anchors can also be vehicles of positive memories. This seems to be the case currently in Quebec with the episode of the "Filles du Roy," who were sent as immigrants to New France between 1663 and 1673. The European population of the St Lawrence Valley was very much male at the time, and wives needed to be found for the young colonists. The arrival of the "Filles du Roy" was the theme of a historical reconstitution in Quebec City in August 2013, as part of the Fêtes de la Nouvelle-France (New France Festival). This remembrance received a lot of media coverage and resulted in a new narrative with feminist overtones: those young women were said to have

> exercised great freedom by choosing their husbands, imposing their language (French), and sowing the seeds of a form of matriarchy. Because of their contribution to the demographic growth of New France, they were also called "mothers of the nation." Some wrote that without them, New France would have died out (51).

Marie and Anne both hold ambiguous places in the novel. Marie is the eponymous character, who lives with integrity and makes certain sacrifices for the benefit of her son, so that he may live a good life. She gives generously of her time and talents as a midwife to others, to help with their families, and educates women so that they may have a better understanding of their own bodies and reproductive health. On the other hand, Marie openly rebels against the church by teaching women how to address unwanted pregnancies, in lieu of letting God's will be done. Anne, to the contrary, comes across as a wicked woman because of her affair with Antoine, a married man, and yet her love and adoration for children (despite her inability to birth them) redeems her as a good woman.

Marie and Anne find themselves as part of an ambivalent, ambiguous dichotomy. In some respects they embody an ideal, Marie as a champion of women and their reproductive health, Anne as a champion of loving children. The women simultaneously possess positive and negative qualities, thereby keeping them in a liminal space where they are neither too good, nor too bad, or where one positive quality seemingly "cancels out" a negative quality. Their "goodness" or "badness" depends upon the perspective of the person with whom they are engaging. For example, for the reader, Marie may come across as a woman advanced for her time, but for Bishop Laval, she comes across as defiant, irresponsible, and unable to carry out the duties of being a midwife. In response to a question asked of her by Bishop Laval regarding her teachings and understandings of the "funestes secrets des sauvages" she has the following

reaction, “Marie ne répondit pas. Elle détestait que les prêtres se mêlent de dire aux femmes d’enfanter à tous les ans, et ce, jusqu’à un âge avancé” (247). Laval tells her that because her daughter, Catherine, died so young that Marie did not have enough time to get attached to the baby. His remark is curt, brief, and insinuates that she should have moved on to have more children, not understanding the pain that her daughter’s death has caused her. Perhaps because children were not expected to live long past infancy Bishop Laval lacks sympathy for Marie’s condition, for which he appears to be unfeeling and crass. For a man who is supposed to embody love and the Christian god, he appears to do neither. Laval seems to believe that mothers should be without emotion or any kind of attachment to a child if they are born and pass within a short time frame, though he does not declare how long that should be. After his remark, and after indulging in the remembrance of the love she still feels for her daughter, Marie eventually replies to the bishop’s question, saying:

> — J’aurais aimé que mes bébés grandissent. Rien ne m’a donné plus de joie que de mettre au monde mon fils et ma fille. Je n’ai pas rendu à terme toutes mes grossesses à cause, sans doute, des travaux harassants que nous devons faire, obligés que nous sommes de transformer nos forêts en champs avec aussi peu d’outils qu’une pioche et une hache (248).

Bishop Laval later recounts feeling “scandalisé” by Marie and their conversation, and considers her a “femme indigne.” In some ways, Laval is the highest authority in the colony, and therefore Marie’s statements “claquaient” as she is standing up to not only a man, but also an institution and authority. Because of Laval’s power in the colony and Marie’s reaction to him, the reader is meant to believe that Marie is fearless in her encounters with authority, that nothing can stop her from doing what is right for women and children. Some people may consider Marie’s act

admirable or even heroic, while others believe her to be disrespectful and go against the grain of what is socially acceptable in society. Laval comes across harshly, blaming Marie for a situation out of her control, attempting to make her look morally and spiritually deficient, while being relentless in his pursuits to evoke the truth from her. He attempts to have the moral upper-hand, and uses God to do so, however he is perceived as pushing too hard, much like those demanding that the colonists work tirelessly to clear the land for the benefit of the crown that caused Marie's pregnancies to fail.

Anne's situation draws parallels to the complexities of human perception and judgment. Depending on one's perspective, Anne can be viewed through vastly different lenses. Some may see her as a woman earnestly seeking a healthy, loving relationship, while others may cast her as a temptress, accused of selfish actions as a married woman entangled with a married man. This divergence in perception vividly illustrates the subjectivity inherent in human judgment.

In Anne's case, the judge assigned to her proceedings happens to hold a favorable view of her. This positive bias significantly influences the sentencing phase of her case. "« Je ne serai pas trop sévère pour Anne », décida-t-il en soulevant son chapeau comme s'il rencontrait quelqu'un. Prenant conscience du ridicule de son geste, il se dit que, décidément, cette femme le troublait beaucoup plus qu'il ne voulait se l'avouer" (158). It seems that men have favorable dispositions for Anne as the reader soon reads the inner dialogue of the judge, "Le juge aurait aimé ne pas la punir et aller lui annoncer qu'il la graciait. Voir la gratitude dans les si beaux yeux de cette femme" (158). Here, we witness how Anne's charms and beauty affect the judge's decision, leading to a more lenient judgment. This interplay between outer beauty, inner character, and its influence on societal judgment raises intriguing questions about the persistence of such contradictions and paradoxes throughout history. Anne certainly possesses outer beauty,

as described by Julien's mother who is still in France as, "d'une très grande beauté[;] une superbe blonde aux pommettes saillantes et aux magnifiques yeux bleus comme le satin" (2969 ch 22). One must reconcile her physical beauty with her inner ugliness. What does it mean for that contradiction and paradox to be passed down in history?

Honor

Marie Major frequently touches upon the concept of honor in its narrative, underscoring its varied meanings contingent on the gender of the characters involved. This emphasis on honor within the novel serves a twofold purpose: it distinguishes the female characters as survivors who weather not only a challenging environment, but also navigate a complex social milieu, and their resilience positions them as sturdy cultural pillars upon which contemporary Quebec builds its identity.

> La légende du peuplement du Canada par les filles de joie continue, depuis trois siècles, de surgir en diverses occasions. Car les mensonges possèdent la vie éternelle. Une fois mise en orbite dans le monde, une fausseté poursuit son tour de la terre inlassablement, irrésistiblement. Les dénégations et les réfutations s'avèrent inopérantes. Par habitude de perroquet et paresse d'esprit, le commun des hommes se plaisent à répéter tout ce qui contredit, dénigre ou scandalise, habitude qui explique comment se rencontrent dans les chroniques du passé tant d'erreurs et de faussetés (Lanctôt 9).

"Honor values articulate gender roles, the importance of reputation in maintaining one's place in society, and maintaining respect for the groups one belongs to. In that sense, honor provides a template for organizing social interactions and hence may be functional even among people and societies that do not highly value and endorse honor" (Novin & Oyserman 9). This

definition of honor comes from a psychology study that looks at honor as a cultural mindset. Novin and Oyserman state that, "cultural mindsets are knowledge networks that serve as meaning-making frameworks and influence what is attended to and which goals and mental procedures are salient" (2). Therefore, if honor can be seen as a mindset, then it is a cultural network that allows its users to make meaning from a cultural framework, thereby determining which pursuits are worthwhile, and tying this back to the cultural imaginary, mentioned above.

While *les filles du roi* occupy a revered place in the cultural imaginary in Quebec as the founding mothers, American author, Aimie K. Runyan, who wrote the fictional novels *Promised to the Crown*, and *Duty to the Crown*, about the lives of three *filles du roi*, notes that, "the *filles du roi,* have often been reduced to a footnote in history books, or else mistakenly slandered as women of questionable morals" (Runyan i). Indeed, the young women sent from France to New France as part of Louis XIV's pronatalist project to increase population numbers in the colony, have endured many interpretations and speculations about their character. One prevailing portrayal, rife with stereotypes, casts them as sex workers, sometimes derogatorily referred to as prostitutes. An enduring testament to this perception can be found in the title of Gustave Lanctôt's 1952 book entitled, *Filles de Joie ou Filles du Roi*, which subtly insinuates moral ambiguity among these young women. The title alone suggests the potential for questionable morals of the young women. Desjardins makes manifest in *Marie Major* the value and seriousness of honor during this time.[13]

[13] Almost synonymous to honor, a woman's virtue is similarly accorded a high value in society's eyes. Rose Pelletier notes in her Masters thesis on *les filles du roi* that, "Le débat sur leur vertu fut vigoureux, leur accordant le statut de « mères de la nation », alors que la culture populaire fait régulièrement référence à un passé sordide" (ii). The effort to defend the morality of the young women sent over to become wives and mothers is paramount in literature, historical and fictive, about them.

In *Marie Major* we find a profound reflection of the value and gravity ascribed to honor during this era. Desjardins underscores this point in her *note de l'auteure* where she asserts that honor during this era constitutes, "le bien le plus précieux" (11). In this context, honor was not merely a superficial concept but a deeply ingrained social virtue that held immense sway over individual behaviors and societal norms. It was intrinsically tied to the perception of virtue and moral rectitude.

Supporting Desjardins' assertion, Hervé Drévillon remarks in his work, *Penser et vivre l'honneur à l'époque moderne* that "l'appel à l'honneur demeure impérieux sur les consciences et sur les comportements : une persistence sociale étonnante (malgré l'hostilité séculaire de la monarchie et des églises), illustrée par l'omniprésence des expressions contenant le mot honneur dans le langage politique, moral et de civilité" and "…l'honneur désigne toute reconnaissance sociale d'une attitude vertueuse" (kindle). In essence, honor was an indomitable force that continued to shape both personal convictions and societal conduct. Making Desjardins' point more apt, Drévillon starts his study in the 17th century, which is when the author's ancestor came to New France, and which is the time period of the novel. This temporal alignment highlights the relevance of honor as a central tenet of social interaction and behavior during this period.

Someone who is honorable attains and maintains an expectation of morality that is lauded by their community. An honorable person is considered trustworthy, ethical, and has high moral standards for themselves. In his book, *Why Honor Matters*, Tamler Sommers writes, "In contrast to the dominant ethical theories with their small set of universal principles, honor spins a dizzying web of values, virtues, codes, commandments, and prohibitions that are constantly changing and evolving. And honor makes no pretense to universality" (4). Sommers notes that honor cultures are considered something of the past and out of date in the West, but honor, I

argue, has a long (cultural) memory, and those who feel they have been unfairly wronged still long to be avenged.

The concept of honor can sometimes be elusive, as Tamler Sommers points out in his book. Published in 2018, Sommers discusses the difficulty in writing a book on honor. He calls honor "messy," a notion that philosophers tend to dismiss as irrational, and expresses his own feelings of ambivalence to the concept (5). Sommers notes that honor is a concept about which society is often "nostalgic," creating narratives in various genres that depict a society living an "honorable way of life" (2). To live an honorable way of life, Sommers points out, hinges on a specific societal context. Some communities embrace honor codes, shifting the responsibility to members of the community, while others favor abiding by laws and respecting individual accountability. Sommers contends that, "[t]he virtues associated with honor such as courage, loyalty, solidarity, accountability, and integrity are precisely what we find lacking in the modern world" (2). However in *Marie Major*, honor is used as a tool of social control.

Gender plays a significant role in shaping the circumstances and conditions governing honor. Honor operates distinctly for men and women, granting or denying them different opportunities, and imposing varying expectations. Regarding women and honor, there is an extra level of responsibility that falls on the women's shoulders. Women become responsible to uphold their own honor and are also accountable for any consequences of actions that might bring dishonor. Sommer writes that "In many honor cultures, women especially seem to bear the brunt of these restrictions" (10). A poignant scene in jail, where Anne meets a woman named Gillette, a woman imprisoned for sex work, vividly illustrates this double standard. Gillette remarks that "« Les hommes s'amusent avec nous et c'est nous qu'on emprisonne »" (151). This quote illustrates the stark contrast in the expectations for female comportment compared to male

standards and actions. Men's ability to exploit women at will results in the imprisonment of the women, who may have engaged in economic transactions or consensual acts. Women bear the responsibility and repercussions of both partners. In this context, honor becomes a pretext for sexism and discrimination.

"Honor has no essential commitment to a notion of universal human rights, so its codes can, and have, sanctioned morally odious behavior on a significant scale" (Sommers 10). In fact, honor can serve as a surrogate for other complex issues such as sexism, oppression, gender inequality, and the ways in which women have been historically oppressed and made culpable for the actions of men. While Sommers brings up the negative side of honor, it is important to note that such behaviors are socially constructed. This social construct is exemplified in the following quote from *Marie Major,* "Marie se disait que la justice jugeait les hommes et les femmes bien différemment. Une femme n'avait aucun recours légal si son mari la trompait, alors qu'une épouse adultère pouvait être enfermée aussi longtemps que son époux le désirait" (236). This quote highlights the disparity in the treatment of men and women in the name of "honor," underscoring that honor is not a universal law but a social one. The theme of honor, while applicable to both genders, wields a greater influence on the lives of women, particularly as instruments of social regulation, and propelled by the forces of sexism and inequality. Julien and Antoine, as evidenced by their actions, appear to have a different perspective on preserving their honor compared to Anne and Marie. Neither of the men seems concerned about preserving their honor when they engage in adultery and murder.

Marie and Julien (the assassin of Marie's husband) are on opposite ends of the honor spectrum in the novel. Marie is manipulated by others with claims (false or otherwise) of honor while Julien manipulates honor to his advantage. Honor, for Marie, can be read as a euphemism

for a sexist double standard. Her honor depends on how men see her, and upon the manner in which they treat her. Marie's future is determined by her brother, whose "justification" for sending her to the *Salpêtrière*, which will eventually lead to going to New France, is that she, "ternissait l'honneur de la famille et souillait le nom des Major" (40). At the time, Marie lives in Paris with her friend, Laetitia, attends medical lectures, and reads. Her sister feels that Marie's "non-conformist" lifestyle to the bourgeoisie impedes upon her (the sister's) ability to find a suitable husband and her brother agrees. Without any parents to intervene, the brother uses his power as head of the family, and by solely his word he has Marie sent to the *Salpêtrière*.

In a moment where Marie is reassuring her son, Pierre, that his father was a man of quality despite his not being allowed to be buried in the church cemetery, she says, "Tu sais bien, Pierre, que les honneurs n'ont jamais été une preuve de la qualité d'une personne. Ils ne sont souvent que les conséquences de jeux de pouvoir" (78). Marie reaffirms that it is indeed possible to be a good person and have no honors to their name, and contrarily, that it is possible to be a bad person and hold many honors. She notes that these titles and decorations that may be attributed to a person are the result of "political games," or what might be called "politics as usual." Similar to the expression, "l'habit ne fait pas le moine," appearances can be deceiving. The idea that honor or goodness lies within a person can be traced back to St Augustine, in which one of his confessions shows that it does not matter if one is circumcised if they love God. Conversely, a man may be circumcised and perform all the correct duties, but if there is no love of, or for, God in their heart, they are missing the key element. As Sommers points out in his book, honor can be tricky to quantify in a person, as it is tricky to quantify in general. It is the society itself who must create and uphold the definition of honor.

Marie's difficulty in experiencing the loss of her husband and finding out that he had an affair renders Marie vulnerable in the eyes of society. Her friend, "Roxane savait à quel point la société dans laquelle elles vivaient était tout axée sur l'honneur et la réputation" (71). Even Julien, the man who killed Antoine, understands the importance of honor in his society, "Julien se disait que les stigmates n'étaient pas toujours aussi visibles, mais qu'ils pouvaient être tout aussi destructeurs. […] Anne, Marie, Pierre et lui-même étaient touchés par le déshonneur aussi sûrement que s'ils avaient été marqués au fer rouge" (281). What Julien may not realize, is that the bodies of these women have in fact been marked. Anne's hair is shaved off as part of her sentencing, sometimes with the knife making her bleed from careless cutting. Marie lost a significant amount of weight after not eating for a period of time, bordering on starvation. The fact that Julien does not know, or comprehend, that these women have physical marks of dishonor—the shorn head and weight loss—shows his privilege from not even considering these possibilities. He speaks of dishonor while remaining oblivious to the fact that his actions also played a significant role in producing said physical effects.

Julien spent his time in the colony networking and building powerful and beneficial relationships. He volunteered in the church and in local politics, which would eventually serve him when he needed to appeal his case, however he confesses the following after he murders Antoine, "Son ascension sociale était bel et bien terminée. Il n'arrivait pas à l'admettre. Son honneur avait toujours compté plus que tout !" (83). And in fact, the "honor" that Julien has built up, like capital in a savings account, will come back to help him. However in his case, this honor speaks more along the lines of reputation, or his name, status, and station in society. Despite assassinating Antoine, his honor and reputation give him sway and clout amongst those who are

in charge of deciding his fate. The judge notes to himself, “J’étais plutôt certain que les sulpiciens allaient protéger Julien” (160).

Julien is not only able to use his connections to learn more about the law and its potential loopholes, but he is also able to fabricate the story of murdering Antoine to his benefit. “Julien a pu inventer cette histoire d’adultère parce qu’il espérait ainsi être accusé d’homicide nécessaire et voir son crime impuni. En plus, son honneur serait sauf. Il sait qu’aux yeux de bien des gens, un homme est justifié de tuer l’amant de sa femme” (107). Julien in essence lies about what happened in his home by “inventing” a story of adultery, not knowing how much of it is true or not-though the reader knows the affair occurred–and counts on the approval of others and the precedent of the justification of killing adulterers. He uses these societal beliefs as a way to justify his actions, and to keep his honor intact. He later appeals his own case, defending himself and becoming angry when he learns that he may not be freed from jail for a second time. He was expecting his reputation and argument for freedom to be enough to unequivocally grant him whatever justice he felt he deserved. Julien angrily demands liberation to regain his lost honor - something Anne and Marie cannot do – and he later declares that he was the real victim because he lost his honor and “le plaisir […] de servir les gens d’Église et les hommes de loi” (304-305). Honor is a social capital that men can use, and women can lose.

Feminism and Nation

Delving into the intricate dynamics of honor, nationalism, and feminism within society, there is a compelling narrative where the symbolism of the National Mother intersects with the profound expectations imposed on women to safeguard the nation's purity and honor. In the context of Quebec, symbols, founding myths, and cultural heritage hold immense significance, shaping the very identity of the nation. Patrizia Albanese, in her book "Maternal Theory," writes a chapter

called, “Territorializing Motherhood: Motherhood and Reproductive Rights in Nationalist Sentiment and Practice” in which she explores the intricate relationship between motherhood, nationhood, and nationalism. She aptly observes that "the image of the prolific, chaste, and virtuous 'national mother' is a strikingly common symbol across nations" (iBook). Within this context, motherhood becomes instrumental in maintaining the unity and strength of the nation, albeit to some extent, by excluding diversity. Homogeneity serves as the cornerstone of preserving a singular cultural identity, aiding in distinguishing who belongs to the nation's fabric and who remains outside its purview.

Essential for the nation, Albanese includes the following, “Anthony Smith noted that for nationalists, “the distinctiveness of their nation lies quintessentially in their cultural heritage, above all, in their unique fund of myths, memories and traditions” (2002: 18). Therefore, nationalists place great importance on symbols, with and over-emphasis on traditions, which Eric Hobsbawm argued created the powerful illusion of primordiality and continuity” and also that “Nationalists at once (re)invent tradition and deny they are doing so” (iBook).

Gustave Lanctôt writes, “De fait, chaque nation tient à défendre la pureté de son origine et ressent comme une insulte toute remarque dérogatoire sur ce point" (12). While this is a charged assertion in terms of nationalism, community, and memory, from a feminist perspective, this translates into a burden placed upon women to maintain an image of purity and impeccable conduct, carrying the weight of national origin in their actions and lineage. Any perceived stain on their reputation tarnishes not just their individual honor but also the broader historical purity of the Quebec nation. Paradoxically, women, including the eponymous character Marie, are expected to embody this purity while simultaneously grappling with societal judgments that cast shadows on their perceived virtue.

Within this framework of preserving cultural heritage, symbols, traditions, and unbroken continuity as the bedrock of honor and a robust nation, *Marie Major*'s narrative provides an intimate exploration of the challenges faced by various characters in the early days of New France's establishment and expansion. The Desjardins family, renowned for their craftsmanship in barrel making, embodies this cultural heritage, symbolizing an unbroken continuity from France to the colony and within their own family. Antoine recognizes the water container that his brother had given Marie before she departed on her transatlantic voyage. The trademark of the Desjardins barrel-making family is superior quality products, and is something that Antoine is able to immediately identify with his family in France, as he welcomes Marie into his new family in New France. His line remains unbroken. Moreover, not only does the line remain unbroken, but Antoine's and Marie's son Pierre carries it forward into the future. Pierre secures an apprenticeship with a man by the name of Desrosiers. Eventually Desrosiers figures out that Pierre is of the legendary Desjardins barrel making family, thus securing his employment with Desrosiers. Pierre's talent eventually takes him back to France, working on a ship, allowing him to travel and begin his life as an adult (who will eventually have several wives, all of whom he loves faithfully, and with whom he has several children).

This multilayered exploration illuminates the interplay of symbols, cultural heritage, and traditions in shaping one's identity. It is within this framework that the expectations placed on women, intertwined with notions of honor, nationalism, and continuity, acquire significance. As this chapter further examines the narratives of children and motherhood, it will uncover nuanced layers that underpin the foundations of an intricate and evolving identity.

Children and Motherhood

Children and motherhood emerge as pivotal forces that can either disrupt or uphold the newly established social order in New France. The absence of offspring in Anne's life, and Marie, a midwife challenging societal conventions, disrupt the traditional norms and raise questions about the continuity of generations. This section will explore the dynamics surrounding motherhood, not only as a moral imperative but as a commitment to shaping the future. Children, as the inheritors of values, beliefs, and traditions, serve as the living embodiment of society's hopes and aspirations. The two characters symbolize a disruption to the conventional path of motherhood, raising questions about the continuity of generations. However, *Marie Major* as a novel exists as proof that the perceived flaws of women like Anne and Marie cannot thwart the progression of generations.

In her book *The Myths of Motherhood: How Society Reinvents the Good Mother,* practicing psychologist and adjunct Associate Professor at Boston College, Shari L Thurer, writes that “Today, mother love has achieved the status of a moral imperative” (iBook). Mothers are expected to do it all and be it all for their children. And these same demands and expectations are also placed on children. They are often regarded as the blank canvases upon which one paints their hopes for the future (Edelman 13). Children serve as the torchbearers of the human race, the carriers of values, beliefs, and traditions (Thurer iBook). They inherit the world as it stands, with the hope that they will improve it for their descendants (Thurer iBook). The purity, creativity, and joy of children inspire adults to rediscover their own childlike wonder and to nurture these qualities for the betterment of the future (Thurer iBook). Moreover, children represent progress, both socially and economically (Thurer iBook). In times when child mortality was high, the survival of children into adolescence and adulthood marked true success (Thurer iBook). The

significance placed on children is not just sentimental; it is rooted in their quintessential role in society and a commitment to the future (Thurer iBook).

Children occupy a queer space within the narrative of *Marie Major.* This peculiarity arises from several facets. First, one might expect the story to feature a cast of robust, cheerful, and healthy children who play a marginal role. Edelman underscores why children can be alluded to rather than explicitly appearing in literature about the founding mothers. He writes, "For the Child, whose mere possibility is enough to spirit away the naked truth of heterosexual sex–impregnating heterosexuality, as it were, with the future of signification by conferring upon it the cultural burden of signifying futurity–figures our identification with an always about-to-be-realized identity" (13). This expectation stems from the cultural narrative surrounding *les filles du roi,* which says that their descendants have multiplied into the millions, perpetuated by strong, courageous, and independent women, traits that one might anticipate inheriting. The legend of *les filles du roi* serves as a foundation for this narrative.

Marie Major deviates from this conventional script. In the novel, only one child, Marie's son Pierre, occupies a central position as the prodigal son, while Marie's daughter, Catherine, tragically does not survive infancy. As a result, Pierre becomes the focal point of hope upon which Marie directs her energy and resources, a scenario that aligns with Lee Edelman's notion of reproductive futurity. According to Edelman, society often invests heavily in children as they represent the embodiment of the future, and Pierre embodies this concept in the story (4).

The novel also introduces other children, some grappling with epilepsy, others abandoned on church steps, or even incarcerated as criminals. These portrayals of "defective" or marginalized children serve to starkly contrast with the idealized child described earlier, one who carries the hopes and aspirations of society on their shoulders, promising a prosperous future.

Thus, the depiction of these diverse children in *Marie Major* challenges traditional notions of childhood and confronts readers with the complexities of societal expectations and the reality of diverse experiences in the colonial context.

In his book, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* Lee Edelman's perspective sheds light on the significance placed on children as the carriers of the past and the architects of the future, reinforcing cisgendered heteronormative relationships as pivotal to societal functioning. Edelmen writes “[t]he Child, that is, marks the fetishistic fixation of heteronormativity: an erotically charged investment in the rigid sameness of identity that is central to the compulsory narrative of reproductive futurism” (21). Edelman goes on to argue that politics perpetuates a social order by projecting its objectives onto children. He cites Walter Wangerin Jr.'s observation after reviewing *The Children of Men*, "[I]f there is a baby, there is a future, there is redemption" (12-13). Conversely, Edelman posits that a lack of offspring equates to a lack of future, placing blame on sterile, narcissistic pursuits as inherently destructive to meaning and, consequently, life itself (13). This starkly contrasts Anne and Marie—Anne's childlessness (whether due to her own sterility or that of her husband, Julian) and indulgence (what Edelman calls "narcissistic enjoyments") challenge societal norms and align with a kind of "death drive" seeking to subvert the dominant culture (13).

Marie's unconventional role as a midwife in *Marie Major* challenges these ideals as she empowers women to make informed choices regarding their reproductive health and bodies - a role that directly defies the Church's teachings and the mandated reproductive futurity imposed by the French crown in New France. Edelman writes, "And so, as the radical right maintains, the battle against queers is a life-and-death struggle for the future of a Child whose ruin is pursued by feminists, queers, and those who support the legal availability of abortion" (21-22).

Stepping back to her time with the Lavasseur family, a family committed to helping Marie, her circumstances become more stable with access to essential necessities like food and shelter. This newfound stability provides her with the freedom and opportunity to wholeheartedly embrace her true passion, midwifery. It is during this phase that the Lavasseur family, acknowledging Marie's unwavering dedication and exceptional skills, urge her to seek the *certificat de bonnes mœurs* from Bishop Laval. This certificate serves to legitimize and credential Marie as a midwife, allowing her to practice her craft. Bishop Laval refuses to grant her the certificate, the tangible representation of the broader ideological struggle depicted by Edelman. In this ideological battle, those advocating for reproductive freedom and autonomy, including feminists and queers, are perceived as threats to the conventional notions of reproductive futurity.

Bristling against Bishop Laval from their first meeting, Marie reacts against the clergy before the meeting. Religious authorities, men in power, told women what to do with their bodies, which has turned out to be both a timely and universal theme for women. It is perhaps because men have have taken so much away from her that Marie feels so strongly about helping women make choices about their own bodies. And at the same time, “la première fois qu’elle avait assisté une sage-femme, elle avait compris que c’était là sa veritable place” (237). Marie was initially placed in the Salpêtrière by her brother after their father died, so that he could take all of the inheritance. She was unable to study medicine of her own volition because of her gender. However, when she talks with her son, Pierre, about how she was teaching a group of women how to avoid unwanted pregnancies, he judges his mother and the women she helped. This angered Marie and the narrator says, “Elle était fort susceptible quand elle parlait de la façon dont les hommes imposaient aux femmes leur destinée.” (345). Even Pierre, a young man,

believed that women ought to behave in certain ways, and that avoiding unwanted pregnancy was irresponsible and immoral. Despite not being married himself, he felt entitled to impose upon women. Marie fights her son with words and examples of how both mothers and their unwanted babies have suffered, physically and emotionally. Working above all with women of lesser means and lower socioeconomic status, Marie is presented as a kind of original Planned Parenthood.

These interactions between Marie, Pierre, and Laval hold particular significance in the narrative because it showcases her unwavering determination to challenge the highest authority in the colony, even when faced with potential obstacles and disappointments, including those within her own family. Marie emerges as a symbol of resistance to the established order, highlighting her commitment to empowering women and advocating for reproductive autonomy in a society dominated by traditional norms.

The very notion that Marie, as a woman, must convince a clergyman of her good morals and honor (a subjective assessment) in order to be deemed suitable to do her job, reflects both legal and cultural nuances. Men face no such requirement to conduct their businesses, highlighting gender bias. Laval ultimately denies Marie the certificate for several reasons, including her husband's adultery and her assistance to women in making informed choices about their reproductive health—actions conflicting with the Catholic Church's teachings. Laval's refusal of the certificate becomes an indictment of her morals and honor as a woman in society.

Transitioning from Marie's denial of the certificate for midwifery, it is apt to bring in the broader societal context and the implications of reproductive control. Lee Edelman cites former cardinal of Boston, Bernard Law, to emphasize the institutions opposed to queering reproductive futurism. Law asserts that society has a vested interest in the protection, care, and upbringing of

children, with marriage being the principal framework for nurturing and educating them (29). The state's interest lies in political and economic spheres, aligning with societal norms (29).

Shari L. Thurer notes in *Maternal Theory* to, "[r]emember that well into the nineteenth century many children arrived unbidden (there was little access to reliable birth control). Many inadvertently caused their mothers' death in delivery; often they themselves died before their fifth year. Infanticide seems to have been a part of Western European life until the late nineteenth century, when women finally gained some measure over their reproductive capacity" (Thurer ch 20). Infanticide does not come up in *Marie Major*, (though perhaps Laval might argue unbaptized children constitute a kind of infanticide in that parents are damning their children to an afterlife of hell by not having them baptized) but this note underscores the importance of women having control over their own bodies, because–as in the example noted above–without a measure of autonomy, women may result to measures that protect their own self, or other children to whom they have a responsibility. Much like the women Anne met in prison while waiting for her trial, they recount stories of their own hardships of potentially being single mothers, of not reporting their pregnancies, and of the misfortunes befallen to other women who could not, or did not, take care of their children in the colony. There is a multitude of reasons that women need control over their own body, infanticide being just one consequence of their inability to have said control.

In *Marie Major*, children are seen both as redemptive agents and future investments. It is through children that adults, namely women, find meaning and purpose, and, in fact, children are the *raison d'être* for *les filles du roi*. Anne starts the story as a vilified character, laying in the arms of her married lover, Antoine, while her own husband is not home. Without any background or context to her love affair, it is easy to pit Anne as a villain. Not knowing that

Julien is a cruel, abusive husband makes it plausible that Anne is an immoral woman. Julien's scurrilous comportment, however, has convinced Anne that their lack of children and her husband's violence is her fault (140). Anne regrets that her lover is dead "because of her" saying:

> –Antoine me parlait de son travail, des gens qu'il rencontrait. Il me mêlait à sa vie, alors que Julien m'en a toujours écartée. J'en sais plus sur Antoine que sur Julien avec qui je vis depuis quatorze ans. Mon mari n'a aucune générosité. Il ne partage ni ses sentiments, ni ce qu'il vit, ni ce qu'il sait. Il est aussi avare de tendresse et de compliments que d'argent. Il est sec comme le piquet dont il a l'air. Avec Antoine, je me sentais revivre, de nouveau dans le mouvement de la vie. Je suis devenue très amoureuse de lui. Et je crois bien qu'il m'aimait aussi (138).

Anne is thus positioned as a woman of love, who loves, whose gentle nature was beaten out of her, into submission, by her cold, selfish husband, but reawakens courtesy of a kind soul who loves her. Knowing that Anne is a victim of an uncaring man opens her up to become a redeemed character, one who will be able to heal through children.

It can perhaps be that the children Anne loves so much are a reflection of herself. "Anne avait toujours recherché la compagnie des enfants. Elle leur donnait un peu de cet amour maternel qui finissait par l'étouffer, faute d'avoir des marmots sur qui il pouvait se déverser" (148). Because she did not have any children of her own, Anne poured her love and attention onto any child she was with. When talking with a young girl who was imprisoned for leaving the service of her master, Anne gives her a handkerchief from Antoine in order to help her feel safe and protected from the cruelty of the crowds. She provides empathy and words of wisdom in a way that seems as if she is trying to provide advice to her younger self, saying not to hurt or

humiliate others in the future as she is about to be publicly humiliated and that, “cela te sera facile parce que tu auras compris ce que l’on ressent quand on est humilié. Tu vois, moi j’ai mis du temps à comprendre cela. En un sens, tu as de la chance de pouvoir le comprendre alors que tu es encore jeune” (149). Anne’s depiction as a woman who will, and wants to, love children in whatever role is available to her reinforces the normalization of women as nurturers and care-givers.

Anne's longing for affection and her quest for redemption become central elements of her character arc. However, Anne's journey towards redemption is fraught with obstacles that extend beyond her complicated emotional landscape. The consequences of her affair with Antoine eventually catch up to her, and she finds herself facing a harsh judgment by the authorities of Ville-Marie: her head is shaved and she is banished from Ville-Marie forever. This sentencing and punishment further complicate her path, serving as a stark reminder of the societal norms and moral judgments that cast a shadow over her pursuit of love and motherhood. Despite these challenges, Anne's resilience and unwavering belief in the redemptive power of motherhood continue to drive her character's evolution, adding layers of depth and complexity to her narrative.

After Anne’s banishment from Ville-Marie, after her brief stint in a cabaret from which she is kicked out, and after the governor decrees that the shacks she and other itinerants live in be destroyed, she finds herself at a church (326). Sister Lauréanne offers her “une main secourable” that “lui ouvrait un nouvel horizon qui pouvait l’aider à trouver un sens à sa vie et à ses épreuves” (327). Anne performs needed jobs for the sisters in order to earn her stay with the Ursuline nuns, but the reader learns that Anne’s “real pleasure” lies elsewhere. When she is able is to spend time with the young girls and be called, “Aunt Anne” she feels herself being healed.

In caring for the simple needs of children, Anne is able to deal with her trauma and humiliation. No other form of work or labor provides her with the same meaning or purpose as spending time with children does. Caring for children is described as almost inherent to her person and character. Wanting to love children appears to be a characteristic of Anne, and not a role or function that she performs.

One of the Ursuline nuns who has been so kind to help Anne, Sister Lauréanne, finds an infant, Ignace – as is written on a card with him – who was left at the church. She notes two things of importance in this brief encounter: that women in precarious economic situations who needed to "abandon" their children could be hung to death in the public square, and that she never mourned for missing out on being a mother, a role she wanted to undertake (403). This reveals how serious the pronatalist policies were in that a woman could be condemned to death for refusing to fulfill a biological capacity unique to women. This harkens back to an instance when Anne is in jail awaiting her hearing and speaks with a woman named Gillette. Gillette attempts to abort her fetus and when a neighbor finds her lying in a pool of her own blood, the neighbor rushes to tell authorities instead of helping her. Gillette says, "Je sais bien qu'on me pendra" (151).[14]

The novel illustrates an inequality between men and women, and the unfairness and unjustness of being a woman who lived in 17th century, New France. She lives by a strict standard not necessarily required of her male counterparts. And yet, at the same time, while

[14] It is not difficult to imagine ignoring a person in need of medical attention in order to report them to the authorities for making their own reproductive decisions. Reproductive rights in Canada are relatively young. 1969 saw the decriminalization of contraceptives in Canada, and the ability for doctors to perform an abortion if it was determined to be medically necessary for the woman. The 1988 case of R. v Morgantaler decriminalized abortion, ruling that the lack of access to abortion violated the Charter of Rights and Freedoms for female Canadians.

showing female characters who resist, the novel also reinforces certain conservative beliefs and values, such as the church who asks women to be mothers and rejoice in this role.

> Outside the Church, maternity was considered a woman's destiny; Lori Saint-Martin, in her study *Le nom de la mère*, notes: 'Religious discourse, broadly circulated in Quebec until the 1960s and even beyond, shows [the mother] as asexual, smiling despite her pain, and altruistic' (13). Such an image, although perhaps noble, can hardly be thought to inspire anything but an ambivalent maternal desire. At the same time, as Dumont indicates, religious orders promised women the exalted possibility of 'spiritual maternity'; the nun was to be 'a bride of Christ, a mother of souls' (285) (Kellett-Betsos 126).

For Anne, who is neither able to have children, nor likely to become a nun, she finds herself an outcasted dilemma. Today, the roles and expectations of women have changed in terms of mothering and motherhood, however the default still seems to be asking girls and young women how many children they hope to have once they are married.

Heteronormativity and mothering of this kind have been naturalized, though they butt up against the work-life demands for the modern woman. As Catherine Rottenberg writes in her book, *The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism*, "the balance discourse reinscribes the normative expectation that women should have – and should want to have – children" (82). Both Marie and Anne want children. Marie has simultaneously been successful and unsuccessful in having children. Anne has not been as fortunate as she hoped regarding birthing and rearing children. Ironically, Anne prays to Saint Anne to help her conceive children, and hopes that the name will bring her luck, however to no avail (154).

In *Marie Major*, some of the narrative's more subtle conservative underpinnings become more apparent as we delve into Marie's story. Whereas Marie has been a relatively unproblematic character until this subject, it is here that she and Anne trade places as "wicked" women. Anne loves children and wishes could have them, however she is unable. Her infidelity paints her as an immoral, unethical woman, however her love for children and desire to have them repaints her in a more saintly light and redeems her character.

Marie has a son she loves and a daughter she lost in her infancy. The reader sees, however, in Marie's conversation with Bishop Laval as she seeks to attain the *certificat de bonnes mœurs* in order to practice as a midwife, and in another conversation with her son, that Marie has a bit of a rebellious streak in helping women. Marie appears as a character who defies the church's teachings and the desires of the state, practicing reproductive care independently in ways that challenge established norms. As the story unfolds, the novel subtly critiques Marie's non-conformity.

Independent from the church, though also needing to be certified by the church, Marie practices reproductive care in ways that are not in alignment with the teachings of the church or the desires of the state. This independence is deemed dangerous and intolerable. The character of Bishop Laval, who represents the religious establishment, is portrayed as a guardian of moral virtue and tradition, contrasting with Marie's defiance. In a moment where the reader glimpses the thoughts of Laval in a third-person omniscient rendering, one reads, "L'évêque pensait qu'elle n'aurait jamais dû avoir un permis de sage-femme parce qu'il savait qu'elle n'était pas très vertueuse et ne tenait pas compte de ce qu'il édictait" (246). His edict was that all children should be baptized within three days of their birth (246). Marie, as a woman who had studied some science back in France, and as a woman concerned for the health and well-being of the

babies she delivered, would sometimes encourage women to wait to have their children baptized, for fear of them being exposed to the elements and/or being too cold. While Marie's intentions for the children may have been to protect and help them, her defiance of Laval's decree positions her as anti-clerical and anti-establishment. Is it possible to be a good woman when one does their job well, but contradicts a guiding establishment who helps so many in the colony?

Conclusion

Edward Said writes in his book *Beginnings: intention and method*, of considering "how many words and ideas in current through however about the concept of 'beginnings': *innovation, novelty, originality, revolution, change, convention, tradition, period, authority, influence* to name but a few" (italics in original 6). Beginnings offer hope, sometimes trepidation for an unknown future, and possibility. Mothers offer an excellent source of beginnings for the children they may bring into the world, and after many generations, one can look back to the origin of their family line and heritage, with the hopes of having a better understanding of their family, their roots, and themself.

As written on a plaque dedicated to the young women who participated in the state sponsored program by the crown (see Figures 2.1 and 2.2):

Entre 1663 et 1673 plus de 770 filles du roy,
venues de France, débarquèrent à Québec.
Marguerite Bourgeoys, fondatrice de la Congrégation de Notre-Dame,
désigne sous ce nom les jeunes filles, bénéficiaires d'une dot royale,
qui viennent en Nouvelle-France pour y « prendre mari » et contribuer
au peuplement de la colonie.
Elles y sont attendues.

En 1663, il y a plus de 700 hommes célibataires pour 65 filles à marier.

En quelques années, la population de la colonie triplera, passant de

3 000 habitants à près de 10 000 habitants.

There is no doubt that *les filles du roi* have left an indelible mark on their descendants, and on the history of both Quebec and Canada. Brought over for their reproductive value, willing to make the journey for choice and freedom, the *filles du roi* are gaining in popularity and beginning to receive more attention from scholarly and academic circles.

Figure 2.1 *Plaque dedicated to Les Filles du Roy in Quebec City*

Figure 2.2 *Plaque dedicated to Les Filles du Roi in Quebec City*

In discussing the function and power of literature in reproducing models and values within specific cultures, this novel acts as a mother in that it reproduces a detailed history of Quebec, imbuing it with care and consideration, and continuing the belief in, and mythology of, the strong, central mother. Much as mothers were tasked with replicating the Old World in the New World, Desjardins' novel passes on values, beliefs, and ideals, similarly to how DNA passes down information from one generation to another. *Marie Major*, both the novel and the historical personage reproduces and births history, and as is familiar to any French speaker, the word *histoire* in French means both history and story. And the stories we tell about ourselves reveal our beliefs about ourselves and how we want others to perceive us.

Alon Confino defines collective memory as, "an exploration of a shared identity that unites a social group, be it a family or a nation, whose members nonetheless have different interests and motivations" (1390). A shared collective imaginary of the *filles du roi* can be found in Yves Landry's example below:

> L'ardeur manifesté par les historiens à rétablir la réputation des Filles du roi s'explique aussi par la force de l'idéologie nationaliste conservatrice qui domina largement le Québec entre 1850 et 1950. Animée par le clergé et un grand nombre de membres des professions liberales, cette idéologie définissait les Québécois 'comme un groupe qui a une histoire édifiante, qui est devenu minoritaire, au XIX siècle, et qui a pour devoir de préserver cet héritage qu'il a reçu de ses ancêtres et qu'il doit transmettre intact à ses descendants. Essentiellement, cet héritage se compose de la religion catholique, de la langue française et d'un nombre indéterminé de traditions et de coutumes. Le temps privilégié de cette idéologie est le passé' (Landry 30-31).

It may be difficult to know who these women were, but Landry underlines a possible reason for the interest in these women: a conservative national ideology. Conservative standards tend to rely heavily on the past, on defined traditional values, and a rigorous set of morals. It would not be within the realm of a conservative ideology to believe that a group of women who are touted as the founding mothers of the modern nation are flawed beings who did not have the glory of the state in mind when they came to New France with the express purposes of becoming wives and mothers. It is a contemporary, conservative mindset that declares these women heroes of the modern nation.

Adding a unique, and sometimes conflictual, perspective on memory is Jocelyn Létourneau, who espouses the belief that, in order to move towards the future that Quebec says it wants, the nation needs to release its hold on the negative view it has traditionally held of itself. He writes in his book, *Passer à l'avenir:*

> Pour exister maintenant et demain, les Québécois ont pour devoir de se souvenir de leurs misères, de porter à leur tour la souffrance des anciens, une souffrance immémoriale stigmatisée par autant d'événements tragiques. Comme si le passé canadien-français puis franco-québécois n'était fait que d'empêchements. Comme si le « roman national » de ce regroupement ne pouvait être articulé qu'autour des griefs (20).

Létourneau highlights the need to move past the hurt from the past and use the memory of it as a catalyst for action, not inaction. Létourneau writes, "Pour permettre aux héritiers d'avancer et de vivre, le passé doit être en effet tremplin et source de motivation. Surtout, il doit se faire rappel positif, sans quoi il devient fardeau écrasant ou *spleen* paralysant. Le rôle de la mémoire, on l'oublie souvent, est d'enrichir l'expérience, non pas de retarder l'action" (22). Desjardins has written a conservative book with *Marie Major*. In this book, there are no English speakers, or British colonists to be found. The indigenous population is mostly non-existent, save for Platon, who has been enslaved and is working for his freedom. There is not much pushback against an idealized, white society in Quebec. There are indeed moments where the author pushes the envelope, so to speak, in terms of rebelling against church teachings and educating women on their own reproductive health, but the novel comes across as mostly in praise of a pure and good heritage, of which one should be proud and should honor.

This discussion serves as a vital bridge, connecting the historical challenges related to women's control over their bodies, such as infanticide and the lack of reproductive autonomy, to

the central themes of motherhood and children in *Marie Major*. By delving into these historical issues, we gain a profound insight into the formidable obstacles that women encountered in the past. This contextual understanding enriches our interpretation of the novel's central themes, notably the profound significance of motherhood and the intricate web of complexities that surrounds it. Furthermore, it underscores the enduring relevance of these themes and their reflection of both historical struggles and societal norms. It is through this historical lens that we can better grasp the multifaceted roles of women and children in *Marie Major*, recognizing them not merely as literary characters but as embodiments of historical struggles and evolving societal norms.

CHAPTER 2

Mother as hope: Romanticized Casket Girls in Louisiana

"…despite the fact that this was the year of our Lord, 1728, a woman simply could not survive for long without the protection of a family or guardian and, later, a husband or the Church."

The Last Casquette Girl, Lorena Dureau

The preceding chapter explored the history of Quebec's *filles du roi* and Sergine Desjardins' novel, *Marie Major*. This chapter shifts focus to Louisiana and a group known as the Casket Girls. In the early 18th century, Louisiana, like its northern counterpart, faced its own set of challenges. Struggling to establish a foothold in the colony, Louisiana's governing authorities turned to New France for the solution. They petitioned Louis XV to send over young, unmarried women with the hopes of replicating the success of New France's program that sent over *les filles du roi*. Like *les filles du roi*, the Casket Girls were given a small dowry that they brought over in their suitcases, called *cassettes*. Originally known as *les filles à la cassette*,[15] the term has morphed from *cassette* to *casquette,* for this reason, it is possible to see variations of the spelling of this name, such as: Casquette Girls, or Casket Girls.[16] No matter the spelling of their name, these women occupy diverse spaces and interpretations within the Louisiana imaginary. Some view them as romantic heroines who embraced the unknown for love, while others entertain the

[15] I have been unable to locate any concrete linguistic information about the morphology of the word *cassette* to *casket*. My best guess is that the combination of the French women who arrived with their *cassettes*, or suitcases, the French speakers from the forced Acadian diaspora in 1755 (the Great Displacement), and the other languages in Louisiana at the time (English, Spanish, for example), that the French word *cassette* morphed into English as *casket.* Some authors use the spelling of *casquette*, but that seems to be an embellishment of the word, or a flourish nodding to the French influence in Louisiana and not a French word for "suitcase."

[16] For the purposes of this dissertation, I shall refer to this group as the Casket Girls, any other spelling variation will reflect the choice of an individual author.

notion that they are daring women who harbored, or even were, vampires on a transatlantic trek. No matter the interpretation, the Casket Girls have left their own indelible mark on both the culture and literature of Louisiana.

Textual background

Here Will I Remain (2016) and its sequel, *What We May Be* (2017), are two of Gretchen Craig's most recently self-published works, and part of her *New Hope* series. She recounts the lives of a group of Casket Girls – women similar to *les filles du roi* – who were sent from France to Louisiana by the crown to become wives to the Frenchmen in the colony, and bear and raise their children. *Here Will I Remain* begins with the women's journey on the aptly named ship, the *New Hope*, as it sails from France to Louisiana, and the subsequent lives they establish with the husbands and communities.

Narrated from an omniscient perspective set in the early 18th century, Craig's novels share similarities with the soap-opera mechanics found in Sergine Desjardins' *Marie Major.* The narration from the points of view of different characters allows the reader a fuller, deeper understanding of the characters' plights. The morals and values disseminated in the author's novels are a critique of modern values, not those of the past. Craig uses her characters and scenarios to propose solutions to current issues, albeit anachronistically. By addressing modern issues within an 18th-century historical context, the novel thus becomes a platform to discuss difficult topics, such as domestic violence, sexual trauma, and labor abuse. This literary approach not only engages readers, but also highlights the timelessness of certain societal issues and the potential for literature to serve as a stage for discussing and exploring them.

The first novel, *Here Will I Remain*, focuses principally on the three women–Catherine, Marie Claude, and Agnes–who develop a deep bond of friendship on the *New Hope*, the lives

they build with their husbands, and the challenges they face along the way. Each woman marries and moves to her husband's home where she cooks, cleans, and performs other traditional heteronormative duties. The novel examines situations of budding love, abuse, child loss, and trauma, amongst others, and how the women work together to support one another. As follows the formula of the romance genre, this novel ends with a happily ever after.

What We May Be, the second novel in the series, continues the stories of Catherine, Marie Claude, and Agnes, but also looks at the lives of Sister Joelle, a novitiate aspiring to be a nun in Louisiana, and Fleur, a Native American woman, both of whom fall in love with Frenchmen and navigate the obstacles preventing them from being in a relationship with each man. This novel expands on the issues of enslavement, taking the veil, religion, intercultural and interracial love, marriage, and children, again, resulting in a happily ever after for everyone.

The name of the ship, the *New Hope*, carries profound symbolic weight, and offers multiple levels of interpretation. From a political perspective, both the French government and the representatives in Louisiana embark on this journey with the aspiration of turning a profit and establishing a robust foothold in Louisiana. The ship's name embodies the collective optimism for economic prospects and territorial acquisition.

For the women setting sail to the colony, the name "New Hope" embodies ideals and promises of new beginnings and abundant opportunities. The stories they hear fuel their ambition to leave behind their past and step into brighter days, envisioning their lives unburdened by previous hardships and constraints. Because they are able to bear children, they also carry hope within them for the future. Their reproductive capacities symbolize the promise of a fruitful future, and emphasize the role of women in shaping the destiny of the colony.

Meanwhile, the men eagerly awaiting the arrival of the women harbor hopes of their own. They seek wives who will efficiently manage their homes and children, thereby enabling them to seek out their fortunes. Like Quebec and their *coureurs des bois*, the men in Louisiana seek to use nature and its resources to build a better life for themselves and create upward class mobility, something that was not available to them in France.

Thesis Statement

This chapter looks at ambivalence and ambiguity in Gretchen Craig's *New Hope* series. It weaves together the romance genre, postfeminism, and neoliberal postfeminism to show the difficulty in claiming female independence while simultaneously tethering her to previous expectations of marriage and children. Mothers are hardly existent in the series, though this is often the personal goal of the characters. Women like Marie Claude and Joelle become surrogate or step-mothers, though do not birth their own. While Craig appears to espouse a progressive view of women, the novels, as we will see, illustrate a woman of a more traditional background, one who wants to be a wife and mother.

I start this chapter with a brief conversation on postfeminism and romance, which then leads into self-publishing, the romance novel, and postfeminism. While analyzing the novels in conversation with theory, I discuss the concepts of awakening in the romance novel, revenge fantasies and partner abuse, as well as the labor of (re)production in the colony, which ultimately leads to a dialogue on children and parenting, thus concluding the chapter.

Postfeminism & the Romance novel

Stephanie Harzewski writes in her book, *Chick Lit and Postfeminism,* "Chick lit is not the only existing type of postfeminist novel, but it is the most culturally visible form of postfeminist fiction" (kindle). Postfeminism offers a compelling re/framing of the romance novel, one that

seeks to empower women. It begs the question, however, does postfeminism reinforce traditional patriarchal norms? The stories about the Casket Girls open up dialogues that explore the complex dynamics of gendered experiences within a postfeminist culture.

Elana Levine's work on postfeminism and popular culture, *Cupcakes, Pinterest, and Ladyporn: Feminized Popular Culture in the Early Twenty-First Century*, offers valuable insights. Levine observes that "in a postfeminist culture, paying attention to the specificity of gendered experience is sometimes seen as *reproducing,* rather than challenging, old-fashioned sexism, as seen, for example, in cultural debates over whether it is sexist to identify the social bookmarking site, Pinterest, as feminine" (5). This chapter will engage in a discussion concerning the intricate relationship between reproduction, as highlighted above by Levine, and its interplay with self-publishing, the romance novel, and postfeminism. It examines how ambiguity and ambivalence are harnessed to uphold traditional roles and tropes, all while preserving the illusion of their transformation. In particular, it offers illustrations of normalized aspects of women's roles, actions, and desires in American culture, such as those of wife and mother, which may inadvertently reinforce pre-feminist beliefs, albeit now coded as neoliberal.

Topics presented in Craig's series further illuminate these ideas. These works delve into multifaceted topics including morality, partner abuse, past sexual traumas, and worker's rights, and serve as poignant examples of how the novels project an appearance of progressiveness while simultaneously supporting certain modes of traditional expectations, starting with the publication process of the series itself.

Self-Publishing, the Romance novel, Postfeminism

Self-publishing

In the past, self-publishing was seen as a “vanity project,” following Henrik Fürst’s description in his article on self-publishing. He presents a nuanced perspective, acknowledging both the positive and the negative aspects of self-publishing. On the one hand, authors have the freedom to bypass the restraints of publishing houses, which liberates them from “established hierarchies” within the industry (Fürst 484). However, it also has detractors who argue that self-published works may be stigmatized as being of “inferior quality” since, according to Fürst, “in vanity publishing, a publishing company publishes almost anything for a fee without any content or quality control” (484).

The advent of self-publishing in e-book format introduces a novel parallel. The characters in the stories who journey to Louisiana are seeking a new life and are willing to take risks and make decisions for themselves, free from the constraints of their past. Similarly, self-publishing authors are making choices about how to bring their work to the public without relying on traditional publishing houses, thus taking greater responsibility for their literary destinies.

Traditional publishing has typically demanded that authors submit their manuscripts to publishers, with the hope of being accepted for publication. This route provides security in terms of manuscript support, editing, marketing, and distribution. However, it also entails a form of gatekeeping within the industry, where publishers may seek specific genres or works with mass market appeal. In contrast, authors who opt for self-publishing take on greater responsibilities, including editing and marketing, although many companies offer support teams for these aspects. Nonetheless, the risks of self-publishing are accompanied by significant rewards. Authors retain a larger share of their profits, and they enjoy greater, if not exclusive, creative control over their work, fostering a sense of empowerment (O’Leary 18). Henrik Fürst aptly characterizes self-publishing as emblematic of a "do-it-yourself culture," exemplifying the American ethos of

pulling oneself up by the bootstraps (484). Given this perspective, it's unsurprising that a narrative about women seeking new lives in Louisiana would be published in an equally do-it-yourself manner.

This do-it-yourself ethos, combined with fewer quality checks than traditional publishing, provides readers with a more unfiltered view of a story and the author's perspectives. Lauren Berlant's exploration of popular literature and culture underscores the significance of engaging critically with seemingly ordinary and popular narratives. She emphasizes that the very popularity and everyday influence of such works necessitate a more intensified critique (Berlant 12). While self-publishing may indeed attract skepticism from some quarters, Berlant rightly argues that what appears as normalized and unremarkable requires a more poignant examination by discerning readers.

This critical engagement is facilitated by the contrasts among the characters in Gretchen Craig's works. The protagonist, Catherine de Villeroy was meant to lead a privileged, aristocratic life in France until her cousin falsely accused her of a crime she did not commit, tarnishing her reputation and causing her to be sent to the Salpêtrière. Her cousin's deceitful actions were driven by a sinister desire to seize her inheritance, leaving Catherine with a profound sense of loss and betrayal. Catherine, as an aristocrat, functions as an outsider, offering a unique lens through which to explore daily life among her peers. The disparities in socio-economic status among the women serve as a poignant reminder that narratives like these, whether self-published or traditionally published, possess the power to illuminate the complexities of human experiences and challenge conventional norms. In a world where readers seek both relatability and fresh perspectives, the unfiltered nature of self-publishing and the critical examination of popular

narratives become tools for discerning readers who endeavor to delve deeper into the stories that shape our understanding of the world.

In exploring the significance of normalized behaviors and their potential to challenge established norms, it becomes evident that the scenes in which the women take turns brushing each other's hair and braiding it reveal an aspect of life with which Catherine is unfamiliar, having always had others care for her. Conversely, Rachel's curiosity about braiding Catherine's hair illustrates how the women appear exotic to each other, shedding light on learned behaviors that many readers might take for granted (1: 10). These seemingly routine actions in the novel underscore normalized behaviors and emphasize their significance.

The romance novel, another medium subjected to negative bias, shares parallels with self-publishing. Pamela Regis notes that critical rejection of the romance novel can be traced back to the feminist movements of the 1960s (3). In an era when women were striving to broaden and expand their horizons, and move from the private to the public sphere, the institution of marriage and the responsibilities of motherhood often confined women to traditional domestic roles, encompassing cooking, cleaning, and child-rearing. Given the limited control women had over their lives, often viewed as their husband's "property," (consider that women could not have their own bank accounts until the 1960s or have a credit card in their name until 1971), it becomes apparent why the romance novel was met with resistance and aversion, as it seemingly embraced the very shackles feminists of the 1960s and 70s sought to break free from.

The Romance Novel

The relationship between the romance genre and feminism can be complex and occasionally tense. Romance novels encapsulate both positive and negative aspects of women's lived experiences and have garnered both praise and criticism. On one hand, these novels offer a

space, and a platform, for female agency, desire, and empowerment, centering on romantic relationships between women and their partners. Yet, they can also perpetuate harmful gender stereotypes and reinforce heteronormativity and patriarchal power dynamics. While advocates of romance novels contend that these stories illuminate possibilities for love and relationships, critics argue that they promote unrealistic expectations and portray women as passive objects of desire for men.

Postfeminism

Conversely, the relationship between the romance novel and postfeminism can be mutually reinforcing. Both prioritize women's happiness above all else, often entailing fulfillment in traditional heteronormative roles, such as that of a wife and mother. Postfeminism asserts that women play an active role in their choices and behaviors, even when these choices may involve objectification, sexualization, or subservience to men. As Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra observe in their work *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture*, "[postfeminism] is troubling and yet at the same time compelling" (4).

Maya Rodale, in her book, *Dangerous Books for Girls: The Bad Reputation of Romance Novels Explained*, highlights how romance novels have promoted radical ideas about women's lives. She writes, "[b]y creating stories with an intense focus on a heroine—her choices, her pleasure, her independence, *and her rewards*—romance novels promoted radical ideas of what a woman could do with her life and inspired women to try to make that dream a reality" (emphasis in original 19). In Gretchen Craig's novels, the heroines do not initially possess the autonomy to make choices, and later when they do, their choices remain limited.

Women's choices - ?

The opening page of "Here Will I Remain" conveys a sense of coercion as a man forcefully places Catherine on a ship, likely having drugged her, given her disoriented state as she awakens. One of the opening lines reads, “He’d put her aboard a ship” (1: 1). Her attempts to assert herself are met with derision from a dismissive captain who ignores her pleas and orders her below decks (1: 2). She asks herself, “Is this a prison ship?” (1: 2). Catherine's journey begins devoid of agency, and the choices she can eventually make are constrained.

Similarly, many of the women who embark on the *New Hope* have limited options. They have decided to leave France in the hopes, albeit with no guarantees, of securing a better life.

> Each of the girls had been given a basket with a draw-string top, a gift directly from the king. He wanted Frenchmen to colonize the new Louisiana territory and those Frenchmen needed French women. Naturally, women were reluctant to leave their homes, their families - - to leave civilization - - in order to colonize a wilderness. Therefore, the king’s agent had swept through the prisons and asylums, choosing women with no options but who seemed healthy enough and young enough to survive the journey (1: 7).

As this excerpt shows, the women have a dearth of choices: they can move away from their families and support systems for a chance at a better life, or remain in France in their particular circumstances with limited prospects. The predatory manner in which these women are targeted is evident, as they represent easy targets for those seeking to fill their ships with eligible women. The women's choices are transactional; in exchange for better prospects, they agree to leave France, knowing they will be sold off to become wives to the Frenchmen already residing in Louisiana, and mothers to the children they will bear them. In exchange for their willingness to

establish themselves as wives and mothers in the colony, the French crown offers the women a small basket with a few basic supplies, a *cassette*.

"All of these women had led hard lives, [Catherine] learned. Prostitution, vagrancy, thievery, even violence had landed them in the Salpêtrière. From there, they'd boarded the New Hope, taking them to the Louisiana colony for a second chance at a life, a chance to be respectable wives and mothers" (1: 7). This novel falls within the romance genre, celebrating women making their own choices. However, it is clear from the above quote that their choices range from sex work, homelessness, and abuse to leaving their entire lives behind and starting over in an unknown overseas colony. The second option seems much more appealing, as the novel naturalizes and idealizes what it means to be a wife and a mother, portraying it as respectable and an opportunity to do something worthwhile and productive.

Once the ship lands and everyone arrives in the colony, the agent, Bonnard, allows the women a few days to rest before they are to be sold to their new husbands. He has paid for them upfront and is looking to recoup his money, so with a few extra days on land and with food, hopefully, they will look better and fetch more profit for him. When Catherine mentions to Bonnard that she does not want to marry, he replies that she does, in fact, since that is why she made the journey to Louisiana. A young woman named Rachel retorts, "Not like we were given a choice," to which Marie Claude replies that this alternative is better than the Salpêtrière (1: 17).

Choices for these women exist between making money to stay alive, or making someone else money to stay alive, and within those choices the romance novel offers them the choice to embrace their situation and hope for a good partner. In this way, it seems less of a choice and more of accepting their fate and finding as much joy in it as possible. Near the end of the first book, Catherine tells Jean Paul, "And that life, with jewels and carriages? Apparently, that is not

the life I was meant to lead. I'm here, with you. I'm meant to be here, Jean Paul, in this cabin, in this bed, with you" (1: 206). After all, Catherine was meant to lead a privileged, aristocratic life in France until her cousin took it away from her. The idea that she should let go of her past and heal from the pain her cousin caused, acquiescing to a new life as a farm wife in such a short amount of time seems unrealistic. On the other hand, women are often asked to make conflictual decisions. While women have fought for the ability to work outside of the home and also raise families, the demands of each can be overwhelming, often forcing them to choose one or the other and be content with their choice. This does not, however, mean that the choice for a woman is fair, just, or equitable; it merely highlights the necessity of learning how to find happiness with the results.

Neoliberal feminism

This complex interplay of choices and expectations also finds a connection to the concept of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is an economic and political ideology characterized by the belief in minimal government intervention in the market, deregulation, and the promotion of individual self-reliance (Steger & Roy xvii-xviii). This ideology, as explored by Catherine Rottenberg in *The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism*, has far-reaching implications. Rottenberg argues that neoliberalism and feminism can work hand in hand, producing a specific type of individual or way of thinking about oneself and one's role in society. She writes, "Neoliberalism's ongoing and relentless conversion of all aspects of our world into 'specks' of capital, including human beings themselves, produces subjects who are individualized, entrepreneurial, and self-investing; they are also cast as entirely responsible for their own self-care and well-being" (7). In some ways, neoliberal feminism sounds similar to postfeminism: taking care of oneself by oneself, making

choices that are best for the individual, and forging one's own path. However, it perhaps differs in its relationship to human capital as an "ungendered productive unit" (x).

This perspective carries profound implications for how women's roles, particularly as mothers and homemakers, are perceived and valued in society. It underscores the notion that women, often in the role of stay-at-home mothers and housewives, have functioned as a form of human capital. In this context, women who choose to stay at home and take care of their families play a crucial economic role by reducing various household expenses, including those related to childcare, transportation, cooking, and cleaning, among others. Business Insider sheds light on this when it reports, "Salary.com estimated that if stay-at-home parents earned an annual salary for all the jobs they performed on a daily basis in 2020 and 2021, the median would exceed $184,000." This substantial figure underscores the economic value of stay-at-home parents and emphasizes the importance of recognizing their contributions. Despite often being unpaid, the task of raising children and maintaining a household is not only challenging but also carries significant societal consequences, a point that feminists have drawn attention to.

Sister Joelle - a naive perception

In the context of women engaging in unpaid labor, Sister Joelle, in the second novel, *What We May Be*, sheds light on the experiences of the already established women in the colony, who are meeting after church in a circle. She explains, "These women came over a few months ago, and they teach each other the skills they've learned to cope with life here in Louisiana" (2: 35). This quote underscores a communal nature of sharing knowledge among the women in the group as they adapt to their new environment. It highlights an almost innate resourcefulness and resilience displayed by these women as they exchange valuable insights and techniques for their domestic labors.

Sister Joelle appears to have no understanding of the conditions women faced in France. She muses, "'It's all very exciting, isn't it?' Sister Joelle said. 'Choosing a partner, starting a new life in a new world'" (2: 33). Sister Joelle comes to Louisiana the following year with another group of women, also recruited to be wives and mothers in the colony. Her naiveté reflects a modern view, believing that women in France truly had a choice. It also reflects a contemporary ability to look back on the past and fully know that their lineage will continue and that descendants exist today. We know that their trek was fruitful, even if filled with hardship then and now. Thus, Sister Joelle can be a character who overflows with optimism, sees the best in others, and believes that everything will turn out according to God's will, which will inevitably be a happily ever after.

Awakening

While perhaps not meant to be represented as such, Sister Joelle could be read as an allegory for goodness and innocence. However, as her desires begin to conflict with the demands placed upon her by the church, Joelle falls out of her naiveté and becomes a more awakened, developed woman. As Maya Rodale writes, "Women's sexuality has been endlessly discussed, often by men, and often by celibate men at that. Too often, the options presented are extreme opposites: She must be a virgin or a whore; she is innocent and good and has all the potential in the world, or she is ruined, bad, and useless. [...] Romance novels are the space where women can examine their sexuality on their terms" (110). As Rodale writes, "[t]he romance heroine's virginity signifies the unawakened woman. And romance is about a woman waking up" (113). Rodale frames the romance novel in such a way that a woman's awakening is powerful and positive. No longer does a woman need to hide in the dark about having sexual desires or just remain a passive passenger in her life; she can own her own sexuality.

Awakening serves an important function in romance novels, allowing the genre to be seen as a kind of bildungsroman. Just as the bildungsroman explores a character's growth and maturation, the romance genre delves into a specific type of character development, leading to their awakening. Maya Rodale's definition, as mentioned earlier, focuses primarily on a woman's awakening to her own sexual desires. However, it is important to expand this notion of awakening to include a broader perspective. Awakening, in the context of literature, refers to the moment when a character experiences an epiphany or a profound realization that fundamentally alters their understanding of the world around them. This moment of awakening is followed by changes in their behavior, and that growth and transformation result as the character looks at life through a new perspective, an awakened perspective. No longer is the character butting up against old problems and conflicts within themselves, but they are able to progress and move forward, surpassing former barriers which prevented them from achieving their goals.

Awakening is a transformative process for characters, and necessary for the progression of the novel. It can be used to critique or challenge established norms or beliefs of the character, thus opening them up to a host of new understandings and experiences. This transformation also allows readers a change in their perspective on the fictive world they are examining. The awakening can also be a powerful lens through which to view various themes, such as power, identity, human nature, and society, amongst others. In the context of the romance genre, awakening takes on a unique significance, as it often involves characters breaking free from societal expectations and embracing their desires and emotions. This awakening is a powerful and positive process that allows characters, particularly female protagonists, to assert agency over their own sexuality and lives.

As we saw with the first book, the first line of *Here Will I Remain,* regarding Catherine at that, is, “She’s waking up” (1: 1). At this juncture, Catherine's awakening is literal, as she emerges from a drugged state to find herself aboard the ship, a pawn in her cousin's deceitful scheme. However, as the story unfolds, Catherine undergoes a more profound awakening – one that transcends mere consciousness. This deeper awakening revolves around Catherine's discovery that she can love a man she barely knows, embrace blue-collar work, and find contentment in a life far removed from the aristocratic path originally intended for her.

Much like the first book in the *New Hope* series, which centers on Catherine's transformative journey, the second novel spotlights Joelle. Sister Joelle assumes the place of the central character in this leg of the narrative, guiding readers through her own awakening. Joelle is innocent, a girl in terms of her mental and emotional development, and through whom the reader will experience her own understanding of herself, her needs, and desires. She embodies the trope of the virgin who will awaken and meet and embrace her personal power.

In her newly awakened state, Joelle conflates being a wife and mother. After a period of seclusion, following time spent at Giles’ home tending to him and the children who have measles, and after the two share a kiss, Sister Joelle takes a walk with Father Xavier, who questions her about her heart’s desires, and her relationship with God. Father Xavier, and Giles, at separate times, ask Joelle what she wants, forcing deep introspection for her character. She muses, “There was a difference between doing what the church expected of a nun and doing what God expected” (2: 256). Joelle determines that what she wants is to be a wife to Giles and a mother to his children. Because of her innocence and assumed lack of understanding, Giles, who becomes her fiancé soon after her revelation, asks her, “Do you understand, Joelle? What it means to be a wife?” to which conjugal duties are alluded, and in her next breath she says, “And

I will be a mother. Oh, Giles, I want this so much" (2: 269). This gives the impression that marriage and motherhood go hand in hand, and that each is intensely desired by this female character. Craig sets up Joelle's desires early in the novel, wherein the reader sees Joelle attempting to convince herself that she does not want to be a mother, and that she is not fascinated by the birth that she witnesses. Joelle is constructed in such a way that it seems the best way for a woman to act is to love God, but to love a husband and being a wife, and having children and being a mother even more. This is the ideal woman, according to the novel.

In summary, the exploration of awakening in both Catherine's and Sister Joelle's narratives reveals a complex interplay of choice and institutional influence. Catherine's awakening, initially marked by her literal emergence from a drugged state, evolves into a more profound realization that she can find love in unexpected places and embrace a life far removed from her aristocratic upbringing. Similarly, Sister Joelle's awakening, portrayed through her journey from innocence to self-discovery, is characterized by a conflict between her role as a nun and her desires for love and motherhood. Her introspection and eventual choice to become a wife and mother might seem like an exercise of free will, but it is also influenced by the expectations of the church and societal norms.

These awakenings serve as lenses through which the novels examine the complexities of female agency and choice within the constraints of societal and institutional pressures. They shed light on the deceptive nature of these awakenings, where characters appear to exercise autonomy but are ultimately guided by larger forces. In this way, the novels appear to challenge traditional gender roles, and question the idealized image of women as devoted wives and mothers, but also prompt a deeper exploration of the intersection of choice, agency, and institutional influence. Through these narratives, readers are invited to critically examine the expectations placed on

women and the extent to which their choices are shaped by external factors.

This analysis contributes to the broader discourse on postfeminism and gender studies, emphasizing the need for a nuanced understanding of women's roles and desires within a larger societal and institutional context. It underscores the idea that true empowerment and agency for women may require a more profound awakening that transcends the confines of prescribed roles and expectations.

Revenge Fantasies and Partner Abuse

After having explored the intricate dynamics of personal transformation and awakening in romance novels, it becomes evident that these narratives can serve as a powerful medium for challenging and reshaping societal norms. If one looks at the following definition of a romance novel and considers its possible implications for positive outcomes, it would be incredibly compelling, though perhaps also problematic. Maya Rodale writes that romance novels are "Stories of personal transformation and social change presented [as] a powerful image of how the social norm could be altered for greater happiness" (17). While the traditional romance novel often culminates in the beloved 'happily ever after' endings (known in romance circles as HEAs), it is essential to recognize that personal transformation can take various forms, not always conforming to conventional ideals of positivity. In fact, another facet of personal transformation lies in the exploration of complex and often suppressed emotions, including anger and resentment, emotions that society often expects women to suppress. This exploration leads us into the realm of revenge fantasies within the romance genre, where characters grapple with their negative emotions and desires for retribution.

From the very beginning of the book the reader is confronted with revenge fantasies. Catherine imagines making her cousin Hugo "pay" for what he did to her. She spends her time

aboard the New Hope imagining the various ways in which she can make him regret what he did, and suffer as a consequence of it. Her revenge fantasy never comes to anything more than that, and Catherine finds that as she spends more time tilling and working the land that her priorities change. No longer does she wish ill on her cousin Hugo, but rather she forgets about him completely, thus providing a symbolic death to her past.

Marie Claude

Marie Claude, a character of complexity and resilience, takes center stage in the exploration of revenge fantasies and self-defense in *Here Will I Remain*. Her character is shaped by a tumultuous past that includes a stint as a sex worker in Paris, where her strength and determination led to a fateful confrontation that landed her in the Salpetrière. Upon arriving in Louisiana as an eligible bachelorette, she is met with the harsh realities of plantation life, her husband's involvement in slavery, and the toxic effects of indigo production on the enslaved workers. Marie Claude's journey is marked by her unwavering strength, protective instincts, and her determination to defy societal expectations. These qualities make her a compelling vehicle for readers to engage in revenge fantasies and explore themes of female empowerment and self-defense, as she navigates the challenging circumstances of her new life in the New World.

In this context, readers can use Marie Claude's experiences as a canvas to craft their own revenge fantasies, which often revolve around the idea of her abusive husband facing a tragic reckoning. For Marie Claude, however, her revenge fantasy is coded as self-defense. Diane Negra notes that postfeminism "tends to produce narratives and images that represent female anxiety and fantasize female empowerment in these realms" (12). Perhaps the most notable example of this in *Here Will I Remain* is Marie Claude's inner dialogue regarding the potential for spousal abuse with her new husband. "She wondered if she'd let him [beat her]. He was her

husband. Maybe she was supposed to let him. Well, if it wasn't too bad, she'd let him. Or maybe she should show him the first time he tried it that he might end up with a broken nose. She'd wait and see" (1: 53). Domestic violence and a victim's attachment to an abuser is a troublingly real situation. The premeditation espoused by Marie Clare, though, is even more troubling. Her inner monologue raises the questions of obedience to one's spouse, to duty to oneself and safety, and she blurs the two in an unsettling manner. Has she been so victimized by other men that these are regular thoughts for her? Or is she perhaps arrogant or confident in her own abilities, which have helped her in the past? No matter the outcome, this foreshadows a deeper problem. It comes to a head later in the novel in this first fight listed below, and then a worse one after:

> [Joubert] stood up so suddenly he knocked his chair over. Marie Claude whirled around on instinct and caught Joubert's wrist before he could pound his fist onto her back. That he would hit her in the back he was a gutter rat, no more than that. She squeezed his wrist and pushed steadily, forcing him back and down.
>
> "Let go, you whoring bitch!"
>
> "You ever hit me, monsieur, I will kill you in your sleep." She tossed his arm in his face and turned her back on him. Her ears attuned to his breathing, to his movement, she took hold of the iron ladle. If he moved to attack her, she was ready" (1: 140).

During the second attack, the worst of the two she recalls the following, "Paris, flashed in her mind. That man who'd beat her so bad had come at her like this, mindless and relentless. That time she had ended up in the Salpêtrière, but this time -- she had a child to protect" (1: 175). Marie Claude is unique in her capacity to stand up for herself, due to her stature and confidence.

She has faced adversity and physical confrontations with men in the past, which landed her in the Salpêtrière.

Marie Claude's indomitable spirit and unwavering strength set her apart as a character of unique resilience within the realm of romance novels. Her history, marked by confrontations with adversity and physical violence, lead her down a path that ultimately place her within the walls of the Salpêtrière. However, even amidst the darkest chapters of her life, she emerges as a formidable force, capable of defending herself with courage and determination. The memory of her past, vividly etched in her mind during moments of danger, serves as a constant reminder of the trials she has had to face and has conquered. The author wants readers to see that Marie Claude serves as a character to whom readers can bear witness regarding the complexities of their own lives and the enduring strength that defines them. Her ability to stand up for herself, both physically and emotionally, embodies a spirit of resilience that permeates romance literature. Her story reminds readers that within the pages of these novels, characters are more than mere words; they are vessels of strength, courage, and empowerment, inspiring readers to confront their own challenges and find solace in the transformative power of love and self-discovery. Marie Claude's legacy is one of enduring strength, a testament to the boundless possibilities for personal growth and empowerment that romance novels continue to offer to readers worldwide.

Agnes

In the realm of romance novels, revenge fantasies often manifest as powerful tools for characters to confront their abusers and find personal empowerment. These fantasies typically involve characters seeking direct retaliation or actively pursuing revenge against those who have wronged them. However, within the intricate tapestry of romance narratives, there exists a

distinct and equally compelling form of revenge fantasy, one that differs in its approach but remains profoundly significant. This alternative portrayal of revenge unfolds through the character of Agnes, one of the central figures in Craig's novels, whose journey takes a distinct path in coping with her traumatic past.

When faced with sexual trauma, Agnes has a tendency to shut out the world and retreat into her own mind, becoming a "convenient vessel to satisfy his needs" (1: 143). Agnes's journey begins in her father's bookstore, where an insidious man by the name of Gaspar develops a sinister interest in her. Exploiting Agnes's father's struggles with alcohol and gambling, Gaspar presents an offer impossible to refuse: in exchange for allowing him to take Agnes, he would provide her father with a substantial sum of money, seemingly alleviating all his troubles. Agnes describes the hurt and betrayal she felt from her father by saying, "She had no spirit left anyway – her own father, selling her as if she were no more than a pig or a donkey" (1: 58). Gaspar essentially keeps Agnes as a sex slave, using a book of "far Eastern poses" to show her what he expects of her, and keeping her in a room when he is not with her. Despondent, she is unable and unwilling to please Gaspar. He sells her to a brothel as a cruel punishment to her, and as a means to recuperate what he now considers lost funds. Agnes endures a lot of pain and hardship in the brothel before going to the Salpêtrière.

This trauma follows her to Louisiana when Nolet, who had been a client at the brothel where Agnes had been kept, arrives to stay with her and her new husband Valery. Agnes carries the memory of him and that time within her, which makes her question whether her new husband could, or would, continue to love her if he knew of her past. One afternoon, believing they are alone, Nolet asserts himself over Agnes and attempts to take her in the woods where he believes he will have his way with her. Valery shows up at the right time to protect and defend his wife,

and Nolet leaves with the tip of his nose cut off, and his pride wounded. Agnes' fears are shattered when she understands that Valery loves her and loves her in a way that she has never had. Truly, Valery is a cavalier knight, without the armor. He is touted to have been the best shot and best swordsman in France. Valery's chivalry towards Agnes is indeed a fantasy, women in domestic abuse situations do not have the luxury of a partner coming in at the ideal moment to rescue them.

Partner Abuse & the Romance Novel

Perhaps Craig is attempting to show readers that spousal abuse is different today than it was in the past, that women have always been strong, resilient, and capable of healing. The June 2022 fact sheet from the National Network to End Domestic Violence states the following facts about domestic and sexual violence:

> More than 1 in 4 women have experienced rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime.
>
> Nearly 8 million women are raped, physically assaulted, and/or stalked by a current or former intimate partner each year.
>
> 1 in 5 women and 1 in 38 men have experienced rape in her or his lifetime.
>
> Nationwide, an average or 3 women are killed by a current or former intimate partner every day.
>
> Survivors of color and immigrant survivors face increased barriers to accessing safety and services. A 2019 survey found that 3 out of 4 advocates reported that immigrant survivors fear accessing legal services related to their abuser.

Craig's portrayal of Marie Claude as a potential victim who can fight back, but may choose not to, centers her squarely as a woman with a choice. Craig's portrayal of Agnes as a woman redeemed by a loving husband centers her as the traditional damsel in distress, saved by a good man. The idea that Marie Claude may allow herself to be beaten by her husband perpetuates a harmful idea that is not sensitive to the lived experiences of so many women who are unable to fight back against their abusers. The National Network to End Domestic Violence also reports that 3 women die every day from domestic violence and that intimate violence cost the US economy approximately $9.3 billion due to intimate partner violence in 2017. It is important to bring to light important social issues, such as violence and abuse from intimate partners, however Craig's depiction does not include any sensitivity, nuance, or deep understanding of the severity of the issue.

It is not uncommon for romance novels to address social issues, and, in fact, it is considered a safe place to explore difficult issues that one is unable to address head-on due to the traumatic aspect of the event in question, whatever it may be. Catherine Roach writes that "the point of the story is the power of reparative reading and fantasy to offer a different type of truth and insight. The resonance of romance storytelling lies in this interconnected fantasy power of deep truth and wish-fulfilling illusion" (142). Roach goes on to argue that a reparative reading allows the reader to also see "that patriarchy itself is a fantasy: a massive, neurotic, collective projection of fears and anxieties" and that it is possible to live differently, that there could be an end to the patriarchy (142). While the intention of visualizing an end to the patriarchy and of romance novels provides a means to show what could be–because one cannot be what one cannot see–the real-life abuses and consequences of abuse still exist. In these cases where there are actual implications, it is critical that authors examine the representation of partner abuse in

their works to ensure that it does not perpetuate harmful practices of contribute to the banalization of the abuse.

Pamela Regis writes, “[T]he heroines of romance novels […] must overcome the laws, dangers, and limitations imposed on them by the state, the church, or society, including the family […]. For most of the history of the romance novel, these restrictions were placed upon the heroine simply because she was female. The romance novel’s focus on the heroine, then, is a focus on women’s problems” (29). This notion highlights the genre's unique ability to spotlight women's struggles and triumphs within the broader context of historical, cultural, and societal norms. The romance novel, with its focus on the heroine's journey, serves as a lens through which women's issues can be explored and navigated.

However, when examining the women portrayed in Craig's novels within the framework of Regis' argument, a notable paradox emerges. While these heroines do indeed grapple with societal constraints and strive to overcome them, their portrayal sometimes lacks the depth and complexity that one might expect. These characters appear to conform to certain established norms, particularly regarding their roles as wives and mothers. This adherence to traditional gender roles can create the impression that the heroines are somewhat one-dimensional, as they seem primarily defined by their relationships and domestic duties.

Regis' perspective also raises questions about the representation of diversity within Craig's novels. The heroines in these stories often appear to share common traits, such as their race, socio-economic status, and backgrounds. This lack of diversity can potentially limit the scope of the genre, excluding the experiences of women with different intersectionalities. It raises important considerations about whether these novels primarily cater to a particular

demographic, thus furthering arguments by scholars such as Diane Negra, Angela McRobbie, and Yvonne Tasker, that postfeminism is primarily aimed at white women.

Moreover, while Regis suggests that the novels are about "women's problems," Catherine Roach says that they are about escaping into a "creative respite" where women are able to lay down their daily problems and retreat to a world of fantasy, "all the while affirming the reality of love as a force that can work good in the world" (kindle). This dual nature of empowerment and conformity, along with the portrayal of revenge fantasies, underscores the complex interplay between women's empowerment and gender norms within the romance genre.

Labor of (Re)Production

While revenge fantasies offer a glimpse into the empowerment and challenges faced by the heroines in Craig's novels, it's equally essential to examine the broader societal context in which these women navigate their roles. Beyond the realm of personal transformations and fantasies lies the labor of care and reproduction, a fundamental aspect of their lives in the colonial setting, which have often been capitalized and exploited by economic systems.

In order to continue the work–whatever type of work it may be–the institution needs a continual supply of competent and able workers. This is an apt moment to remember that the Casket Girls were brought over to the colony for the express purposes of marrying single Frenchmen and bearing their children. In *Political Hystories*, Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn write:

> The fact remains that by embracing, for example, a politics of capitalism or mainstream 'liberal democracy', women do not embrace freedom and may in actuality be contributing to the continued exploitation of other women and men of different races, ethnicities, sexualities or religious

> beliefs. It is also true that such an action negates the feminist politics of history and offers little hope for the future (3).

The prospect of having the choice of a husband was exciting for the women, they had very little social capital, and this was the one coin they could spend. In her book, *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny,* Sarah Banet-Weiser writes, "[misogyny] is the instrumentalization of women as objects, where women are a means to an end: a systematic devaluing and dehumanizing of women" (kindle). In *Here Will I Remain,* and the French female emigration project overall, using women as reproductive objects was precisely the objective of the Crown and the program. The government wanted to increase its population in order to increase its labor and economic production, thereby filling their coffers for a small investment.

> Bonnard paced, his hands behind his back. "You know why you're here. The king wants this land colonized, and the colonists need wives. Otherwise," he paused to smile at them, "men are not at their best."
> "I know what an agent is," Rachel said, blunt as always. "You're selling us, that's what you mean."
> "Indeed not, madame. I am the king's agent, paid by the king to facilitate the marriages you all desire" (1: 17).

A few days after this scene, the women are brought into town and placed on a scaffold, where they are sold to the highest bidder. Women are commodities for men in the colony, sold for their "intrinsic value" to men, or their ability to "bear you a son and plow your fields the same day" (1: 23). The women are gaslighted by the man who is indeed selling them as he states that this is precisely what the women "desire." However, as Marie Claude recounts, "She'd been chosen, she was told. King Louis needed her to apply her special skills for his loyal subjects in the new colony" (1: 52-53). Marie Claude mistakenly believed that the "skills" she was being asked to

supply were her sewing skills, though she did figure out that the actual skill the crown was looking for was her ability to bear children. Therefore, the marriages that Bonnard seeks to arrange are not necessarily desired by the women, they are coerced into them under false pretenses.

The meeting of the two main characters, Catherine and Jean Paul highlights the commodification and lack of choice for the women. Catherine is the last woman to be bid on due to a rumor that she had murdered someone, therefore no one wanted to choose her. As she is about to lose hope and fears being sent to a colony brothel, one man stands up and says that he will “take her” (1: 24). Catherine’s description of Jean Paul contrasts sharply against her aristocratic upbringing, but plays into the romance genre’s pairing of opposites, like the country guy with the city gal. She says of Jean Paul, “A filthier human being she had never seen, mud on his clothes, on his hands and face, even in his hair. As he approached the platform, the smell of pig washed ahead of him” (1: 24). For the price of one livre, Catherine de Villeroy is about to become Catherine Dupre, a wife, a farmhand, a mother.

In Mathé Allain's article on French immigration in Louisiana between 1718-1721, she writes the following, "John Duffy insinue ironiquement que l'absence de progéniture chez ces femmes soulève des questions quant aux effets délétères du climat louisianais sur la fertilité humaine" (561). Fertility and motherhood have an intrinsic relationship, and go hand-in-hand. John Duffy's ironic insinuation that the infertility of the young women who were sent to be mothers raises questions about the fertility of Louisiana's land harkens to the link that is often made between women and the land. Production is key for each of these subjects, especially if they are to be considered beneficial to others. The crops produced by a good plot of land were a way to entice Frenchmen to come to the colony. In convincing the men that they could strike

their fortune by moving to the colony to profit off the land, it was also possible to convince them to stay by providing women who would be both wives and cultivators of the land as well. In this way, women could serve as both cultivators of the land, and producers of children.

Craig's novel reinforces the idea of a woman proudly taking care of, and fending for herself, yet the woman does so within the confines of being a homemaker. The novel depicts strong female characters who can take care of themselves and their new husbands with limited resources, newly arrived in a foreign land, while facing a multitude of challenges on her own. The novel highlights and praises Catherine's accomplishments, while simultaneously denigrating the workers on her grandfather's estate. Craig seems to suggest that the best accomplishment for a woman is manual labor that benefits those in a higher class. The higher classes do not receive the same gratification as "peasants" as they do not perform the same kind of work. The novel reads:

> When had Catherine or her friends ever accomplished anything? She had learned to play the piano forte and learned to speak German, but those did nothing to feed anyone, and, truthfully, it wasn't as if she had actually mastered the piano, or German either. Yes, she had planned a glamorous soiree that was deemed a great success, but other hands had polished the floor, arranged the furniture, lit the candles. This she had done all by herself. Imagine, working people must experience this sort of gratification all the time. She had never guessed the peasants on Grandfather's estate led such fulfilling lives" (1: 129).

This paragraph speaks from a privileged place and comes across in an insensitive manner. If being a "peasant" and performing their labor were so gratifying, it would stand to reason that more citizens would change their path to do the same, and yet this is not the case. In fact, many

of the French who came to the colonies, be it New France, the Antilles or Louisiana, did so because class structures were so rigid and there were few to no opportunities for social or economic mobility. If the lives of the workers on Catherine's grandfather's estate looked so "fulfilling" then there is truly a lack of understanding of their labor and lives. The joy that Catherine derives from such labor glorifies blue-collar labor and housework.

The desire to strike it rich in the colony requires hard work, as seen above and with the dedication each person shows to producing their own wealth. It also appears in a lack of compassion for other human beings, notably for the workers enslaved by Léopold Joubert, and by Bonnard for the women brought over on the *New Hope*, as we have already seen.

Joubert is introduced in the novel at the scaffolding where he buys Marie Claude. He is a heinous man, and his character develops into someone despicable, without regard for others, and as a shrewd businessman. His first utterance is to ask for Marie Claude at a marked down price, and he is described as a man whose, "eyes [are] small and close together, his nose a fleshy knob in the middle of his face" (1: 24). While the expression follows that one should not judge a book by their cover, this flattering portrait is a foreshadowing of the ugly man that will be revealed throughout the novel. Joubert's eyes, set together too closely, are representative of someone miserly or avaricious. His nose is not described as beautiful and aquiline, as is considered the traditional Western white male standard of beauty. The romance novel, according to supporters of the genre, use the characters' looks and beauty as measures of their goodness. After having experienced several cruel episodes with Joubert asks herself, "What made Leopold Joubert so mean? Because he was ugly? Well, she was ugly, and so was her brother Michel, and they were not mean" (1: 72). Joubert's physical looks are a literary representation of who he is as a person.

Described as “a stubborn billy goat” and “a gutter rat” (1: 139). The two animals paint the picture of someone who is stubborn, gruff, and considered lowly vermin. His relationship with animals does not stop at the negative similarities he shares with billy goats and rats. “Joubert paused as he passed by her. ‘What you wasting time on now?’ She held the little creature out for him to admire, but her husband knocked her hand, spilling the frog on to the ground. With a smirk, Joubert stomped on it, grinding it into the dirt. He laughed at her gasp and walked on” (1: 71-72). His actions towards defenseless creatures is a tactic to show the reader that he is cruel, without compassion, and abusive of power. The zoomorphic descriptions in the preceding paragraph seek to show that Joubert lacks a certain human rationality, reason, and logic.

According to Marie Claude, Joubert also lacks intelligence. “Monsieur was not a practical man. He worked hard, but he didn’t work smart. […] Worse, he had no idea how to use his slaves” (1: 54). His lack of intelligence makes him kinder than he should be towards the enslaved workers. He allots the four men more food than they need for the amount of work they do, but Marie Claude uses her time on her family farm to help make some changes that end up being beneficial to Joubert’s project. She takes their food and ends up rationing it for them. “And that was that. She hoped these poor souls did not resent her taking control of something Joubert had been loose about. As for whether her husband resented it, well, she didn’t live for smiles from him. This was her farmstead too, now, and she would see it prosper” (1: 55).

While she does have a shrewd business sense, she has a greater sense of morals and ethics as relates to those she loves. Once Marie Claude realizes and understands that the indigo production her husband is forcing upon her friends, the enslaved men, is making them sick, she confronts Joubert to persuade him to stop. “Marie Claude, however, did not intend for her friends

to lose their health making a mean man rich. Joubert would have to breathe the noxious fumes himself if he wanted indigo" and "She must make her husband understand. He had never grown indigo before this year. He didn't know what it did to the lungs" (1: 160-161).

In an attempt to educate others in the colony about the dangers of indigo production, Marie Claude finds her way into town where Nolet, the vat salesman, is giving a pitch to the colonists, encouraging them to expand their productions. She wishes to tell everyone, however Nolet does not want her to make her case, so her encourages her off the platform he is on. The two get into a scuffle and she knocks him out. "Marie Claude stepped over his unconscious body. 'Making indigo kills people. I will not make indigo on my farm. Now you know what it does, you have to decide if you are the kind of person who would kill people just to make money'" (1: 257). She appeals to the colonists' sense of morality and public judgment in the hopes that they will stop production. Instead of trying to find another solution to the problem, one that could benefit many, such as ventilation, or masks, or even at her own home where she could share profits, she wants to shut the whole operation down, which, in a certain perspective, centralizes the power with her. Marie Claude is used to being in charge and having her way.

Marie Claude is a highly outspoken character. She is effusive in her love, protection, and care for those who reciprocate. Marie Claude has a lot of power, but does not seem to want to acknowledge or recognize it. It is almost as if she wants to remain ignorant of the power that she wields over others, believing that it does not exist, or hoping that it does not exist. Her willful ignorance of her intersectional authorities endangers the enslaved people she claims to care so much about.

> "The other thing you got to understand about this place -- it's our place,
> not just mine. The law calls it mine, but Remy, Simon, and Thomas work

> just as hard as I do. It's our place. It's our home. And now it's yours, too. You belong to us, and we belong to you."
>
> Edda's hands stilled over the basket of beans. "You bought me, madame. I know I'm a slave."
>
> "Marie Claude, I told you." Why did people have so much trouble with a simple name? "You're not a slave as long as you're on this property. When you go off it, you'll be safer you act like you're a slave cause that's what people expect, but I don't hold with owning another body. You're free as far as I'm concerned" (2: 135).

In an ideal postfeminist, and perhaps even post-racial, world, Marie Claude could be the poster-child. Even as she attempts to bring Edda into her inner-circle, she criticizes her for not feeling comfortable or smart enough to call her by her first name. Marie Claude further denigrates Edda in an internal dialogue by asking "why did people have so much trouble with a simple name?" (2: 135). This rhetorical question comes across to the reader as passive aggressive, and puts Marie Claude in a position of power by being able to dictate the aptitude of others who can or cannot pronounce her name.

Despite Marie Claude's admission of knowing that the Law decrees certain freedoms, or lack thereof, of enslaved individuals, she tells Edda that she is "free as far as I'm concerned" (2: 135). Nevertheless, Marie Claude's concern does not change the Law or what is considered lawful in the colony. She may believe that she is benevolent in saying that the homestead belongs to everyone, however if governing authorities were to stop by, she would be in charge. If anything happened to Marie Claude on the farm, the blame would likely fall on the enslaved folks she calls her family. Thus, it does not matter how close she may feel to the others, they do not have any legal rights or protections, except as her property. Marie Claude may come off as

kind and progressive to readers, but nonetheless, she upholds the traditional framework from which she originally benefited.

Craig's novels delve into a recurrent theme within the context of French colonization in the New World—the systematic exploitation and commodification of labor, with a particular focus on (re)productive labor. The texts adeptly bring to light the prevailing notion that women, transported to the colony, were primarily perceived as reproductive instruments, fulfilling their roles through matrimony and childbirth to bolster the colony's population and economic productivity. This thematic thread extends its reach, encompassing characters such as the enslaved individuals, who also serve as instruments of labor and, by extension, economic exploitation. Furthermore, it underscores how various facets of labor—be it manual, reproductive, or economically exploitative—converge to serve the interests of the colonial state and its ruling elite. These labor practices emerge as essential tools in maintaining authority and advancing the colonial agenda, often in the face of resistance and challenges, as exemplified by the character of Marie Claude. This section underscores how labor and reproduction function as linchpins in the operation of colonial society, harnessed strategically to advance the overarching objectives of the state, while frequently disregarding individual autonomy and well-being.

Children and Parenting

The theme of children and parenting in the context of French colonization of the New World carries a complex narrative thread throughout the novels. One of the first characters in the first book is a "heavily pregnant, and radiant with joy" woman named Marguerite (1: 8). Unfortunately, around the fourth week at sea a fever spread through the ship. Marguerite is taken by it and as her fever worsens it induces labor, though the child is not yet to term. Catherine and Marie Claude help Marguerite as best they could, encouraging the new mother to stay strong

during her labor. Unfortunately, as the child arrives Marguerite passes away, and the child is stillborn. They are both wrapped together and given a burial at sea. Mother and child die on their voyages to their new lives; and both enter a different kind of womb, that of the earth, the sea. This can be read as a kind of representation of cleansing or purification before the women's arrival to Louisiana. No longer will these women not know who the father of their children is. No longer will they have to sell their bodies and risk their health for the pleasure of men. No longer will they be nameless women with nameless children; they will be wives who inherit their husband's name. Marguerite is redeemed in the eyes of the reader for her time as a prostitute and for not knowing who the child's father is by the love she harbors for her unborn child. Motherhood is a viable option for redemption for Marguerite, and for other women who have had undesirable pasts.

Through motherhood, a woman can be cleansed of all wrong-doing, and can find purpose in her life. Diane Negra writes of the traditional female life path of getting married, having children, and raising a family that, "[s]uch rituals, not coincidentally, all celebrate the achievement of sexual maturity, marriage, or motherhood, and thus one of the consequences of the heightened ritualization of milestones in the normative female lifecycle is that the lives of women without these experiences are temporarily unmapped" (50). The courses of the women aboard the *New Hope* are indeed unmapped, saved by the captain and the sailors who are chartering them to their destination of wife and mother. Behind the captain, however, is the state. It is important not to forget that these women also constitute a biopolitical transaction of the state. They are being sent for the express purposes of their reproductive abilities and to uphold the social institution of marriage. There is relatively little free-will on their part. When one choice is to remain in one of Paris' general hospitals of the time, or to take one's chances on a

new life in an unknown place with a poor reputation, but with a small dowry in tow, the women were not necessarily rushing to get in line for the trek.

Catherine, the protagonist, answers Marguerite's question of if she is excited to be a mother and raise children, replies with, "certainly not" (1: 8). Catherine's reaction immediately vilifies her and sets her as an outcast for onlookers and readers alike. What kind of woman does not want to experience the miracle of life inside of her? What kind of woman does not want to devote herself to the single greatest honor that could naturally be bestowed upon her? The irony of postfeminism is that while it champions women making independent choices for themselves, it also wants them to make certain choices, namely marriage and motherhood. Postfeminism is also buttressed by the neoliberal agenda, which places its trust in the consumer and free market. Much like in *Marie Major*, children are redemptive agents upon whom adults stake their hopes for the future. More than merely investing in the future, however, children provide purpose and seduce adults into wanting to reproduce more children.

In the novels, all women have the capacity to mother, and all characters can be considered children. Fleur, the Native American woman with whom a French soldier wants to build a life, describes her love of Laurent Laroux as a result of caring for him during an illness. "Perhaps she loved him because, in his illness, he had been like her child. He'd been weak from loss of blood and helpless in his fever, and she took care of him until he was strong enough to leave the village and go to his own home" (2: 48). The love described here is one of a mother for her child, almost seen in a condensed timeline, wherein a mother takes care of a helpless infant and raises them to be strong and survive on their own, until he leaves the home to begin his life on his own. This depiction leads to the idea that women in heterosexual relationships are the main caregiver for both their children and their partners, allowing men to remain childlike and

promoting the idea that they are not only unable to take care of themselves, but also of their families.

As previously mentioned, Sister Joelle is absolutely enthralled with mothering and motherhood. “Joelle had never seen a naked body before, certainly never seen a female's lower parts, but she could not look away. Slowly the baby's head emerged, and then the whole little body slipped out of its mother” (2: 70). She quickly and easily invests herself into wanting to care for the children of her love interest. “Joelle gathered Isabel up and held her close, her hand stroking her little back. What a delightful feeling, to have a child lean against her, needing her, even if she were crying noisily” (2: 30). In her article on normative motherhood, Andrea O’Reilly illustrates how American society perceives the perfect mother: one who is white, heterosexual, naturally capable of perfectly parenting, cisgendered, biologically related to her children, readily available with the perfect answer or activity for them, one who is entirely devoted to her nuclear family (and if she has a job the children come first), one who does not assume an identity outside of being a wife and mother, and one who is not sexual (ch. 30). In order for the perfect nationalist mother to exist, as well, she must also be chaste and pure, like the one described by O’Reilly, and much like Sister Joelle.

O’Reilly also writes about sacrificial motherhood, noting that there are three major defining characteristics: 1. that motherhood is natural and instinctual to women; 2. that the mother is the central caregiver in the nuclear family; 3. that children require full-time mothering (495). Craig creates the ideal mother in Sister Joelle in that she is so eager to tend to Giles Travert’s three young children, she could, and would, be the central, full-time caregiver if she were to leave her calling and become Giles’s wife. The only love that can persuade Sister Joelle to move away from being a bride of Christ is to be a mother, much like the revered holy Virgin

Mary. This is not only the only acceptable move for Sister Joelle to make, to love and nurture Giles' children as if they were her own, and to be a good, faithful wife, keeping her family close to God, but also the ideal move. Joelle reproduces Catholicism in her family, and she adds to the state's mission of encouraging families to settle in Louisiana and establish a colony.

Craig's second novel in the *New Hope* series, *What We May Be*, contains an incredibly troubling and problematic situation regarding reproductive labor. Marie Claude becomes pregnant in the first novel but loses the baby due to a severe beating from her abusive husband, Leopold Joubert. Marie Claude, understandably, grieves her lost baby and has a difficult time coping with the loss, but the most insensitive perfect storm happens in her life: Bridget, the unfriendly social climber and sex worker they meet on the voyage to Louisiana aboard the *New Hope*, is moving to New Orleans with her husband for better economic prospects. She recently had a son, Matthew, who she feels will get in the way of establishing her new business, a brothel, and her shapely figure. Marie Claude boldly asks Bridget to leave her son with her, and Bridget eagerly agrees. Shortly thereafter, Marie Claude returns home and tells her enslaved man, (and love interest), Thomas, that "we have a baby" and that she will get the baby as soon as they have a wet nurse. To this information, Thomas replies that he heard that a friend named Henry said, "down at the slave market, they got a girl just had a baby that died. She's got a bad foot and won't ever be any good in the fields, so nobody will buy her. The broker might let her go cheap" (2: 94). Once Marie Claude and Thomas realize that they have enough money to buy this young woman, Thomas says, "Then let's go buy us a wet nurse" (2: 94). In contemporary American society, not only does this scene seem highly unrealistic, but moreover, it is wildly dangerous. Craig effaces the importance she gives to other characters in regards to mothering by suggesting that it can be piecemealed and patchworked together. While the reader knows how badly Marie

Claude wants a child, she becomes emotionally blind to others when considering her own desires. Craig not only promotes putting the desires of love, and in this case the desires of a white women of a higher socio-economic status, above an enslaved girl who also recently lost a baby, but also includes a discussion between Marie Claude and Thomas, who are intent on purchasing this young woman, much as Thomas himself was purchased, much as Marie Claude herself was purchased. Craig has set up her novel so that anyone who is not a white male is available for purchase, and then romanticizes these people as commodities, and denies the young woman her own pain in having lost her child. Not only is her pain and experience ignored, but it could also become a poignant reminder, as she is now compelled to provide her baby's nourishment to another woman's child. Furthermore, Thomas, an enslaved black man himself, ensures that the cycle of enslavement continues by suggesting and enacting a procurement of a black woman for her biological functions. Craig continues a very dangerous and insensitive tradition of enslaving black people instead of empowering them in literature. While there are indeed positive aspects of the romance genre, this novel does not demonstrate them.

Not a child herself, but Sister Joelle is quite childlike in the novel. In a passage where the reader sees her thoughts she says, “It seemed harsh, slavery did, but she didn’t think the Church forbade it. She would ask Father Xavier what to think about it” (2: 39). Joelle acts as an obedient girl, doing exactly what is expected of her and not contradicting others or thinking for herself. The title of father for Father Xavier can be seen as more than a title, but rather indicative of her relationship to him, as she sees herself as needing to be obedient and submissive to him, much like a child to their father. She is even more inclined to consider him as her father as she sees him as a representative of God on earth, doing His holy bidding, and given her sweet, innocent nature she wishes to serve and please her holy father. As we saw in the introduction with Patrizia

Albanese's chapter in *Maternal Theory*, there is a correlation between nationalism and the family, where, referencing Grosby she writes, "the terms 'motherland' and 'fatherland' are intentional classificatory categories of kinship, and imply relational descent" (Albanese ch. 50). In the patriarchy, a child the father is the head of the family and all power passes through him, and in religion the congregation's beliefs pass through the leader of the church, hence why Joelle would ask Father Xavier how to interpret slavery. The purity and innocence of Joelle is precisely what a nation seeks to reproduce, she is a blank slate and the ultimate symbol of chastity and honor.

The theme of children and parenting in the novels set against the backdrop of French colonization of the New World serves as a lens through which we can examine the complex dynamics of gender roles, agency, and societal expectations. While motherhood is portrayed as a source of redemption and purpose for the women in these narratives, it also reveals the constraints placed upon them and the limited choices they have in a patriarchal and biopolitically driven society. Moreover, the novels challenge us to critically assess the problematic elements within the genre, such as the insensitive portrayal of reproductive labor and the commodification of individuals. Through these nuanced explorations, the novels invite readers to reflect on the intersections of gender, power, and agency in the historical context of colonization and the enduring impact of these dynamics on women's lives.

Conclusion

The romance novel, historically dismissed as superficial and formulaic, has undergone a significant transformation, largely catalyzed by the self-publication movement. Scholars like Catherine Roach, Maya Rodale, and Pamela Regis have undertaken scholarly examinations of this genre, challenging the prevalent notion of shallowness and highlighting its remarkable

potential to empower women while subverting toxic patriarchal norms. However, akin to an M.C. Escher painting, the romance novel and postfeminism find themselves engaged in a difficult, paradoxical quagmire: espousing and entrapping themselves in that which they embrace and reject. As Maya Rodale says, "Most scandalous of all, these are books by women, for women, and about women in a culture that doesn't place much value on women" (3).

That there should exist romance novels regarding the historical figures of the Casket Girls is not surprising. As Catherine Roach suggests, Americans naturally gravitate to the idea of love and partnership as foundational for a fulfilling life. Moreover, as the Casket Girls represent a kind of foundational story of the French mothers in Louisiana, it is even easier to romanticize and idealize the idea that they come from France - almost zealously - to find love in the new world and create a strong, thriving family from that. Yet, the harsher realities of women in general hospitals or asylums brought to Louisiana for labor, both in managing households and providing children, are less enticing to portray. Softening historical truths often serves dual purposes: on the cynical end, it does so to turn a profit for the writer, on the kinder end it does so to give pride and purpose to those who are living in the shadows of this history.

Feminism and postfeminism offer two fruitful avenues to discuss romance novels. Critics may want to pigeonhole the romance genre as a genre holding to a single ideology, however like feminism, it is not one size fits all. Various forms of feminism exist to fit various lived experiences of women. Postfeminism cannot be equated with Chicanx feminism or Marxist feminism; each form of feminism is distinct, tailored to the varied experiences of women. Certain aspects may link or intersect with each other; however, they cannot be broadly applied to all women, and such is the same with the romance genre. Each work must be examined individually, in order to provide a full analysis of the work and to understand its viewpoint. And

in the case of the romance novel, sometimes it needs to be explained by several types of feminism.

The novel makes a show of commodifying and objectifying the women. When they arrive in Louisiana, they are put up on public scaffolding, like chattel, to be auctioned off as wives to single men in the colony. To entice the men to buy the women, the agent selling the women, Bonard, says to them, “I ask only that you see their intrinsic value to you, as helpmates as you build your plantations, as partners in a cold bed.” And referring to Marie Claude he continues, “Look at this sturdy one here. She could bear you a son and plow your fields the same day" (Craig 1: 23). These women are an investment to the men, to the colony, for the benefit of the Crown and patriarchy’s enterprise. Historically, women were seen as the property of their husbands or fathers and therefore relegated to the domestic sphere. Women were seen as raw material to be traded for the benefit of another man’s pockets. The power dynamic between the two sexes was unequal, with women often not holding any power but serving and pleasing men in the ways men wanted. In this way, women represent a very powerful currency, especially as one that has the capacity to reproduce the labor force and continue the cycle of worker exploitation.

Banet-Weiser’s definition of misogyny asserts that because these women were instrumentalized as objects for their ability to reproduce (the means to an end), that the system is in itself misogynistic. Women are not allowed choices in this system, and yet, the romance genre romanticizes the experiences of the women in the novels, and postfeminism asserts that feminism is outdated and not needed, thereby limiting the characters in the novels. In terms of women being able to make their own choices in this series, they are able to choose within a limited set of choices, they are not entirely free to make any choice they would like. I have shown that

romance novels and postfeminism would like for others to believe that women have unbridled choices, and that they work out in the woman's favor, however the novels in question ask their female characters to operate within narrow confines and to enthusiastically embrace them, even when it results in violence or abuse, because in the end, it will all work out.

The theme of awakening is critical to this novel, however there are aspects of the novel that remain in the dark, closed for interpretation and institutions that are unwilling to be moved. Catherine shows that with a change in perspective, a woman can learn to love a lower station in life and manual labor. Agnes shows that the right partner can heal a woman rather quickly and easily from past sexual traumas and abuses. Joelle shows that being a wife and mother is a stronger calling than answering that of God. And Marie Claude shows that with enough grit and strength, a woman can overtake a cruel husband or unethical work practice and make a prosperous homestead.

The Casket Girls have not received as much attention in terms of literature or academic study as *les filles du roi,* though young scholars have picked up on them in recent years in Master's theses and doctoral dissertations. There does not appear to be much documentation of this group of women left from the period. Lack of sufficient information or primary sources prevent a thorough and comprehensive analysis of the Casket Girls, and the small number of women who make up the Casket Girls also preclude them from having more of a cultural reach, thereby limiting their recognition on a larger scale. They are also overshadowed by other events in the history of the United States, especially given that their existence takes place in the early 18th century, before the United States acquired Louisiana through the Louisiana Purchase, and before the United States existed as such. Regardless of the obstacles against these women, authors still write stories about the Casket Girls in cultural productions.

CHAPTER 3

Mother as in-between: absent, destructive, and undead in New Orleans

> "D'accord, d'accord. How much of that stuff do I believe?" He twisted the end of his mustache. "Well, I believe bits and pieces of it all. Legends are legends for a reason; they don't just appear out of thin air. But over the years, they morph. They evolve to serve a purpose of the time." *The Casquette Girls* (1: 174)

The legend of the Casket Girls divides rather neatly into two literary genres: the historical romance (see Lorena Dureau's *The Last Casquette Girl*, or Parris Afton Bonds' *Blue Bayou*) , examined in the previous chapter, and the Southern Gothic (see Maggie Mae Gallagher's *Casket Girl: A Mystic Novel*, Amy Plinkington's *Casket Girls*, or Eric Wilder's *New Orleans Dangerous*). This chapter focuses on the literary and cultural influences of the founding mothers through the lens of the Southern Gothic genre. At the heart of this novel is the captivating cultural and historical tapestry of New Orleans, which takes center stage, painting a vivid landscape teeming with monsters, mystery, diverse ethnicities, and their captivating intersections. The city's reputation for mysticism, voodoo, and its distinct blend of cultural influences creates an environment where stories of vampires, witches, and other paranormal phenomena find fertile ground.

As we have discussed earlier, the Casket Girls, also known as *les filles à la cassette*, were young women in the early 18th century sent from France to marry local Frenchmen and contribute to the growth of the Louisiana colony. This endeavor aimed to replicate the successful *filles du roi* program of New France. However, over time, urban legends surrounding these women have

become entwined with the supernatural narratives that abound in New Orleans. As a result, the Casket Girls, who were once ordinary women seeking new lives in the New World, begin to take on new, more enigmatic roles in the collective imagination.

"Vampires. Filles a [sic] la Cassette. It was all one and the same" (Ghost City Tours). Multiple urban legends intertwine in author Alys Arden's *The Casquette Girls* series to create rich and diverse narratives that speak to mothers and reproduction on several levels – with, of course, the Southern Gothic genre itself being a reproduction of Victorian Gothic. Indeed, New Orleans and the Casket Girls provide a fertile ground for the creation–and recreation–of the French imaginary in contemporary New Orleans. Given the multiculturality of New Orleans, it can be difficult to trace one's origins, a task which is made even more difficult by how the multiplicity of folkloric stories overlap and begin to inform each other. Where does one story end and another begin, and to whom does it belong?

Building on the theme of intertwined lives and the inescapable nature of their circumstances, Nina Auerbach offers a compelling perspective on vampires. She writes, "[vampires] promise escape from our dull lives and the pressure of our times, but they matter because when properly understood, they make us see that our lives are implicated in theirs and our times are inescapable" (11). In this, the combination of Casket Girls and vampires is not as arbitrary as one could believe. The question then becomes, how are the two lives implicated and inescapable? In the case of *The Casquette Girls*, the young teenage coven and the 400 year-old vampire family, the Medicis, are all on a quest for answers. Their lives do indeed become implicated and interwoven, highlighting important critical questions, as we will see.

Nature also plays an essential role in *The Casquette Girls*, first as a catalyst in the Storm, and secondly as an element that makes the reader question the fragility of human existence.

According to Catherine Roach, “Nature’s threat is thus both real and exaggerated; our ambivalence both justified and inflated. The ambivalence is real to the degree that nature represents or reminds us of our human vulnerability and mortality” (120).

Thesis Statement

This chapter examines the ambivalence and ambiguity of the absent mother, past/present, un/dead, monster/human, the woman as in-between, and the search for one’s origins. Arden uses the gothic and absent mother to explore questions of a specific liminal space that is sometimes empowering, other times uncomfortable. Binary oppositions and dichotomies, along with common tropes of the Young Adult genre, highlight help to answer the following questions: what does it mean to be a young woman going into adulthood without a mother? What does it mean to return to a once vibrant city that has been destroyed and must rebuild itself with little outside help? What does it mean to love someone who has been purposefully absent from your life? What is it to be un/dead? To address these questions, I propose a contextualization and brief summary of the novel, an explanation of the folkloric New Orleans Casket Girls, followed by an in-depth reading of the Southern Gothic, which will explore important aspects of Arden’s novels such as the Storm, absent mothers, vampires, and the Renaissance, and an analysis of key scenes and examples that illustrate the in-betweenness of mothers and their legacies.

In this chapter I will begin with an introduction to the author of the series I am examining, Alys Arden, and will highlight the importance she places on New Orleans as the ideal location for her series. I will then situate the series within the Young Adult genre, and provide a general background of the novel before beginning a discussion about Mother Nature, and the absent mother - both of whom exist, but only leave traces of their existence in the novels. Vampires are central to my conversation on reproduction. I will also engage in discussions

pertinent to the novel about folklore, the Southern Gothic genre, and the Renaissance's connection to the series, before concluding the chapter.

Alys Arden, heralded by *Invade Nola* magazine as "the Anne Rice of the text message generation," created a 5-volume Young Adult series featuring the Casket – or as she writes, Casquette – Girls as original members of a coven, sworn to protect each other against vampires brought to New Orleans on the ship to the colony. In the series, a coven of young witches simultaneously works with, and against, the 400 year-old Medici family of vampires, to solve centuries old problems, in order to restore peace and equilibrium to their city and their lives. The journey to solve these problems is complicated by their hometown, New Orleans, which is recovering from a destructive storm, complicated family dynamics, and messy love triangles. The quest for one's origins also plays a large role in the series, as the searching for answers reveals more mysteries about the characters' families. For every answer, the coven unearths two questions.

In an interview with the Ascension Parish Library, Arden remarks *The Casquette Girls* as being, "a very Louisiana series" and one in which "the setting is completely central to the series. I don't think the series could take place anywhere else" (2:25-2:28, 2:50-2:58). Indeed, the setting of New Orleans is essential to the series and lends itself quite generously to vampires and the occult. Authors such as Eric Wilder, Amy Pilkington, Maggie Mae Gallagher, and most famously, Anne Rice, have all tapped into the rich side of New Orleans magical lore to create their fiction on vampires and monsters in New Orleans. With the exception of Anne Rice, these authors have intertwined their literary creations of the Casket Girls with the gothic and vampiric stories of New Orleans.

The Young Adult genre is an important feature in Arden's series. Antero Garcia writes in his book, *Critical Foundations in Young Adult Literature*, that "The Young Adult genre is a staunchly American tradition" (5). "Staunchly American" supports Arden's assertion that the series could only take place in New Orleans, a unique American city with a multicultural and plurivocal past. Candida Gillis argues for a multvoice/multigenre style in depicting YA literature because, "adolescence is all about finding one's way–sorting through a cacophony for a sense of meaning, an identity, a truth" (52). Indeed, the characters in the series are all, in their own manner, looking to find their way in the world, either as a teenager, as one searching for their origins, or as someone looking for answers. Speaking of the multicultural aspect of New Orleans, Arden adds, "when I first started writing the book, I was thinking a lot about, kind of, the cultural diversity of New Orleans, and the French Quarter, and kind of how that happened, it being a port city and what that would have looked like through time" (4:26-4:46). To that end, Arden has created a series dedicated to that idea while emphasizing themes of friendship, loyalty, monstrosity, navigating difficult spaces, and resurrection, coming back from seemingly impossible situations – all of which resonate with characters searching for their way in the world, whether as teenagers, seekers of their origins, or individuals in pursuit of answers.

Contextualization of the Novel

Alys Arden's *The Casquette Girls*, set in an atemporal modern day, is the first novel in a series of five books, called *The Casquette Girls* series. As of May 2023, 4 of the 5 books have been published; they are, in chronological order: *The Casquette Girls*, (2015), *The Romeo Catchers* (2017), *The Cities of Dead* (2019), and *The Gates of Guinea* (2020). The entire series is geared towards young adults, and contains elements of historical fiction, New Orleans lore, and the Southern Gothic genre. Arden says in an interview with the Ascension Parish Library that the

structure of the first book "takes three urban legends, real urban legends from the French Quarter and ties them together, and kind of asks what if these legends that theoretically don't have anything to do with each other were tied together through time?" (3:57-4:14). The first book, *The Casquette Girls*, is told in the first person, through the main character, Adele Le Moyne, though it does shift voices and narrators when she translates a travel diary she finds from 1728. (In those instances, the reader hears the voice of Adeline Saint-Germain through Adele's translations. In later books in the series, the chapters switch narrators between other pivotal characters and the reader experiences the book from various perspectives.)

The novels follow the principal character, Adele LeMoyne, as she moves back to a devastated New Orleans, post-Storm. Strange things start happening after the return. She begins to be drawn to certain places and objects, like an attic window in the Ursuline convent that inexplicably opens and closes despite the lack of wind, to an area below the floorboards in her room which leads her to a mid-eighteenth-century journal, and to a magical, abandoned house in which to practice her burgeoning witch skills.

She is brought together with a young man from New York City, named Isaac Thompson, who is in town helping FEMA with the repair and rebuilding of the city, and a peer, Désirée (Dee) Borges, whose family owns the Vodou Pourvoyeur, a shop specializing in magic, and whose father is the mayor of New Orleans. As the three begin to spend time together, they discover, and share, their magical abilities and learn that they are descendants of an 18th century coven composed of seven women, the original Casquette Girls coven. They seek out and find more descendants of the original coven, Codi Daure, Annabelle Lee Drake, with the hopes of working together. The coven also collaborates rather closely with the Medici Family (Gabe, Emilio, Nicco, and Lisette Monvoisin, who was part of the original Casquette Girls coven but

was turned into a vampire) and come together in order to work against other supernatural forces who are sending orbs and ghost drinkers to take over human souls for their own return to power.

The original Casquette Girls coven (in the story) included women who were not expressly sent over to Louisiana by the French Crown, but rather was made up of a variety of women. This included women who helped each other avoid monstrous men–vampires, sugar cane enslavers, lascivious crew members–on the journey. In some ways, the women who made up the original Casquette Girls coven nod to the multicultural nature of New Orleans. The coven is composed of three French women, an English woman, a Haitian woman, and a Native American woman. As Adele and her friends learn about their own history as descendants of witches and their own power, they work, learn and grow as a coven, adding layers of meaning and understanding to the original Casquette Girls.

Folklore of the Casket Girls

That two very different threads of literature–the Romance and Southern Gothic–should emerge from one singular subject, the Casket Girls, is reflective of the current cultural climate and the misstep of historians. According to Marita Woywod Crandle. "The many errors historians have made in their documentation of the girls from France and their association with the Ursulines helped to manifest what has become a curious and interesting legend" (47). The Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities (TORCH) defines a legend as something that "deals with heroes," sometimes with a "semi-historical basis" and a "close connection with a particular place" (The Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities). Folklore, on the other hand, tends to deal with magical beings and makes use of "common motifs" and shared beliefs (The Oxford Research Center in the Humanities). TORCH asserts that myths, legends, and folklore are shared because, "they are rooted in general human experience," "have important roles in our culture,"

and “hinge on ethical or moral issues.” So when Adele asks her friend, Ren, the New Orleans tour guide, if he believes in legends and he replies that, “they evolve to serve a purpose of the time,” the reader must discover who the hero is, the role they play, and what cultural and moral dilemma they are being invoked to resolve (1: 174).

Arden embraces the cultural diversity of New Orleans and the various practices in her series. Désirée Borges, for example, is a descendant of Marassa Makandal, who Ritha, Dee’s grandmother describes as, “a remarkable woman. A very powerful woman: (1: 305). Marassa’s story appears to be a piecing together of Vodou deities and a figure from Haitian history. Natalie Léger indicates that the word, *marasa* means “twins,” or twinned entities, and that François Makandal was a revolutionary figure in Haiti for standing up to plantation and sugar cane owners. Furthermore, François Makandal is touted as the “epitome of the maroons” in Haiti (Boyce et al 645) for standing up to enslavers and going so far as to poison French authorities (Burnham 1362). Makandal worked with local plants to create poisons, and in Arden’s series, Dee and her family work with local plants and herbs to create healing potions and remedies. The connection to knowing the earth remains intact in the novel.

In her article, “One Plus One Equals Three: *Marasa* Consciousness, the *Lwa*, and Three Stories,” Toni Pressley-Sanon describes the concept of *marasa* as one of dichotomies, reminiscent of structuralism: “here/there, us/them, and home/abroad” and also include, “the attendant third element/space/moment of resolution or completeness through creativity” (119). The use of dichotomies and binaries in Young Adult literature helps to distinguish distinct borders. As in the Pressley-Sanon quote above, the sharp juxtapositions between an “us” and a “them” serves to show who is in a group and who is outside of it. In a time when teenagers are

trying to find their place in the world, they may use these kinds of binary determinants to make sense of their environment.

The *marasa* are highly revered in Vodou and in ceremonies are often "invoked […] immediately after Legba, opener of the gates between the living and the spirits" (ibid 120). In Arden's story, the character, Makandal, does not share his first name, but does have a sister who he wants to get off the island of Saint Domingue, away from the sugar plantations and to freedom. The sister's name is Marassa and she does indeed make it safely to New Orleans with the other women. Arden weaves the concept of *marasa* and the history of François Makandal together in her recreation of the Makandal siblings and descendence in her series. "Within the modern lexicon of the Haitian language, the word *makandal* retains a number of significant meanings related to magic, secret societies, and amulets" (Burnham 1363).

Expanding upon the mystique within the Southern Gothic genre, the Casket Girls assume a different role and function within the narrative, compared to their portrayal in historical romance, even taking on new origin stories. Eric Wilder's novel, *New Orleans Dangerous*, the final installment in an eight-book series narrated by detective Wyatt Thomas, provides a succinct depiction of the Southern Gothic Casket Girls legend. Wyatt is hired by Sister Lydia, an Ursuline nun, to investigate a satanic ritual at the New Orleans Ursuline convent. Armed with limited information, Wyatt embarks on his quest, guided by Sister Lydia and his friend, Rafael. Along the way, he encounters the story of the Casket Girls. The tale recounts how the women came over to become wives and mothers in New Orleans, how they stayed in the Ursuline convent until they took their marriage vows, and how, "it led to rumors that the convent was occupied by vampires brought over from France by the Casket Girls. The young women were the supposed hosts of the vampires who lived in their caskets in the attic. It's an old wives tale that won't go

away," to which Wyatt replies that old wives' tales always contain a certain amount of truth in them (21 Kindle).

Drawing on the concept of collective memory, Sister Lydia presumes that Wyatt retains not only the fundamental storyline of the Casket Girls but also the reason for their arrival, and the speculative tales that shroud their journey. While this rendition provides a general and elementary retelling of the legend, it does touch upon the pivotal elements of the Southern Gothic Casket Girls legend, particularly the theme of vampires. This version of the story encapsulates the distinctive essence and impact of New Orleans on a seemingly straightforward narrative of French women dispatched to a colony to assume the roles of wives and mothers.

Figure 4.1 Old Ursuline Convent – photo from St Louis Cathedral website

Other versions exist that are more detailed and accuse the actual girls themselves of being vampires. As told by GhostCityTours.com:

> They arrived in 1728.
>
> […]

Upon the sight of [the women], however, rumors began to circulate throughout the town.

"Pâle," the Frenchmen all muttered to themselves as they spotted the women meant to become their brides. So very pale were the girls that their skin reddened and blistered within moments of enduring the hot, sub-tropical sun.

Clutching their casket-shaped chests in tight grips, the young women—Filles a la Cassette, as they became known—were brought to their new home. Until their respective marriages, they were to remain under the care and the protection of the Ursuline nuns.

The fate of the Filles a la Cassette was not as was expected. The local men in the Vieux Carre gravely disrespected the women. Some were placed into unwanted marriages, only to be mistreated by their husbands. Others, upon finding themselves alone and unwed, were forced into prostitution.

The French King had had enough. He demanded the girls' return to France.

The Sisters of the Ursuline Convent then took the casket-shaped chests that had once carried everything that the Filles a la Cassette had owned and climbed the steps to the third floor of the Convent at 1112 Rue Chartres. Up until this time, the windows and door to the third floor had always been sealed shut, and they remained so at that time as well.

But a short time later, when the nuns returned to the third floor, they found that the chests . . . they were completely empty. They spared no section of the third floor during their search though the belongings were never recovered. Fearing that the young women might have been

something other than what they said they were, the Ursuline nuns spared no expense in making sure that nothing ever left that third-floor space. The doors were bolted shut; the nails to the windows were blessed by the Pope himself and locked in place.

The whispering began anew, but this time they added one more word: "Vampire."

In 1978, two paranormal investigators seeking answers to whether the Filles a [sic] la Cassette had, in fact, been vampires, camped out directly in front of the Old Ursuline Convent at 1112 Chartres Street. They'd been previously kicked off the property itself for loitering, but decided to stay the night and see if they experienced anything right outside of the walls themselves.

The hours passed, trickling by minute by minute; so slow was it, that sleep overtook them. And in their slumber, they failed to notice the third floor's shutters—the same one's which had been locked shut by the blessed nails—open and shut, open and shut. The recording cameras whirled to a stop as the scene faded to black.

The next morning the bodies of the investigators were found.

Their bodies had been torn open, ravaged as if by the claws of animal . . . their bodies drained of blood.

Vampires. Filles a [sic] la Cassette. It was all one and the same.

Figure 4.2 A 17th century chest, similar to what the Casket Girls would have used, and what would have been rumored to harbor vampires

Clearly, this is an implausible scenario with no factual evidence; however, on the other end of the spectrum, as seen in the introduction to the dissertation, Walter Blumenthal and Marcia Zug argue that the Casket Girls did not even exist, let alone become prostitutes in the city or be recalled to France by the king. It is highly probable that paranormal thrill-seekers have spent time around the Ursuline convent trying to capture EVP readings or witness strange happenings, but that does not mean that the Casket Girls existed as depicted by Ghost City Tours or harbor vampires in their suitcases.

It is far-fetched to believe that vampires exist, and yet the Ghost City Tours website still lends a shred of plausibility to the story. One can see how a willing reader could be pulled into the lore. With such a strong presence of gothic and vampire culture in New Orleans, if one were to find a vampire anywhere in the world, it would be here. In his comparative ethnography article on vampires in Buffalo and New Orleans, John Edgar Browning, who studies actual vampires, describes the community of self-defining human vampires as, “a defiant culture” that encourages its own empowerment by “critiquing and challenging the power structures that re/produce it” (1).

In his book, *Fear Dat: New Orleans: A Guide to Voodoo, Vampires, Graveyards & Ghosts of the Crescent City*, Michael Murphy describes New Orleans as "the modern-day vampire capital" and notes that those who believe they *are* vampires find a welcoming and accepting home in the city (69). While vampires like Dracula, the Count of Saint-Germain, and Lestat do not exist, works like the above, combined with the elements of the Southern Gothic genre allow a person to imagine what could be if vampires actually existed.

The Storm and Mother Nature

In the case of *The Casquette Girls*, Adele LeMoyne is the young Byronic/distraught heroine whose plight involves solving an old mystery that seems bigger than her and her friends and must be kept hidden from her father and others, thus isolating her. At the same time her hometown has been destroyed by a natural disaster and recovery is slow. The disruption of her daily life, the uncovering and understanding a centuries old curse, while dealing with the loss of her city, and coming to grips with the fact that vampires are on the loose, (which could be her fault, and one of which is her own absentee mother), is not the typical path from young adulthood to mature adulthood. Changing schools, watching one's town change due to globalization and commercialization, working out the tricky intricacies of love for the first time, and seeing parents with a new understanding of them as individuals are experiences that young adults can relate to. While the vast majority of teens will not have to face hurricanes, vampires, and magic powers, they will have to deal with environmental changes, potentially uncomfortable and dangerous liminal spaces, discovering changes in their bodies, and learning that their parents are not perfect.

"The Storm was the largest in US history. Scientists were still debating whether it should even be considered a hurricane because it had smashed all previous classification parameters" (1:

4). Arden, a native of New Orleans, was outside of her hometown in 2005 when Hurricane Katrina touched down, yet she was in New York City when Hurricane Sandy hit and has experienced other hurricanes as a New Orleanian. Arden notes that she did not want to model the fictional storm in *The Casquette Girls* series after Katrina, because she wanted it to be a storm that anyone who has ever experienced one could relate to, she wanted the Storm in her novel to be an "amalgamation of hurricanes" (Ascension Parish Library). Despite Arden's attention to crafting a fictional storm that is not Katrina, it is difficult not to bring Katrina into conversation with the book, given the essential setting of New Orleans, and the devastation that was projected in the media at national and international levels.

Katrina's Imprint: Race and Vulnerability in America is an edited volume by Keith Wailoo, Karen M. O'Neill, Jeffrey Dowd, and Roland Anglin, the first of its kind that addresses hurricane Katrina and the vulnerabilities of lower socioeconomic classes in New Orleans in terms of transportation, health care, and labor markets (2). The authors write in their introduction that, "Katrina was one of those moments when deeply structured inequalities (in housing, in environmental exposures, in access to health care and transportation, and in media coverage) and suffering poor people themselves came briefly and tragically into view" (1). Sometimes it is possible to hide one's suffering, however in this case the Storm has made its impact visible to all. Hiding one's suffering is not possible, "It took me several blocks to realize the very distinct line drawn across all the abandoned houses was an indicator of where the standing water had sat for days. The mark of the Storm." (1: 15).

In a similar vein, the characters who suddenly show up in New Orleans do come "tragically into view," from the newly formed shanty towns where Adele's friend and folkloric tour guide, Ren, lives, to the dispossessed vampires of the Medici family. "To invoke Katrina,

therefore, is to continue a debate that started with the storm: about the role of government and the private sector, about the role of race in structured vulnerability, and about the problem of recovery, relocation, and the challenge of starting over" (Wailoo et al. 3).

From the very first page of *The Casquette Girls,* the themes of recovery, relocation and the challenges of starting over are present. Adele begins the story in her father's car, getting ready to head home to New Orleans, from Florida by way of Paris, as he had sent her to live with her mother after the Storm. Soon thereafter, the reader learns of the poor relationship Adele has with her mother, "As soon as he caved, I fled the Parisian boarding school where my French mother had dumped me while my father and I were 'displaced.' She didn't tell me goodbye and I never looked back" (1:4). The coldness of her French mother is contrasted against the warmness she feels for her dad and hometown, "In my sixteen years, I'd never been away from my father for that long. I'd never been away from New Orleans for that long either" (1:4). The time in question is two months, but by Adele's account, the two months were enough to change her life and perception on the world.

Deborah Wilson Overstreet writes in her book, *Not Your Mother's Vampire*:

> Vampire literature began as part of the Gothic tradition. Gothic literature originated in the 1700s and frequently, though not exclusively, focused on the supernatural. Setting was a crucial factor in making a story part of the Gothic tradition. Most of these novels, poems, and stories were set in distant and melancholy places, e.g., old castles, dungeons, moors, and mountains. The main action regularly happened during storms or at night. It seems that the primary intention of Gothic fiction was to scare its readers and to evoke a sense of dread. This is where the Western literary vampire was born (Overstreet 2).

While the nightlife in Arden's novels is not the lively Bourbon Street of Mardi Gras one may typically imagine because of the Storm, the major events of the novel do occur at night in a broken city trying to rebuild itself. The effects of the Storm also encourage a kind of darkness to the city, both literally and figuratively, and sustained by the Southern Gothic genre. Darkness is one of the hallmarks of the genre and is represented and aided by a lack of light in the series. From the dark bars, to the underworld, to the night time supernatural activities, the Storm has brought a notable darkness to New Orleans.

The Storm is the catalyst and driving force in this novel. Before the Storm, people lived their lives as one would in New Orleans, but the Storm creates a disruption and a displacement to the quotidian. This allows, but also forces, the young coven to be brought together and discover their magical abilities, in order to work as a team in an effort to break a centuries old curse. However the growth does not come without discomfort. In her book, *Mother/Nature: Popular Culture and Environmental Ethics*, Catherine Roach writes that, "The environment becomes a screen onto which [...] anxieties are projected, and popular culture becomes the theater or arena in which they are played out" (122).

Roach argues for three types of mothers depicted in, and by, Mother Nature: the good mother, the bad mother, and the hurt mother. The Good Mother depicts a kind, giving, benevolent mother who cares for her children and gives endlessly from her supply (122). The Bad Mother creates fear in her children and withholds her love and nurturing from them (121). To name a few examples, she is illustrated as storms, unfruitful crops, and hurricanes. Of the bad mother, Roach writes, "nature can make us feel helpless and vulnerable, as if back in the cradle, whether the cradle of civilization or babyhood. Nature can reduce us to a sense of infancy wherein we feel in grave danger from the perceived attacks of the mother" (119). Moving back

to a devastated New Orleans after the Storm, Adele and her father experience the need to rebuild their lives, Adele as a student and Mac as a bar-owner. Their house sustains minimal damage compared to others in the city, the worst of their structural issues being that a tree crashes through one side of the house, destroying Mac's art space. Their home, their safe space leaves them vulnerable to the elements, like helpless infants exposed to unknown realities.

"Floods and hurricanes pose dangers and represent 'nature's wrath,' but perhaps equally harsh is the apparent unresponsiveness, the givenness of nature. The Bad Mother, after all, not only devours but also withholds" (Roach 121). Mother Nature is apathetic. She responds to the stimuli given to her and acts accordingly. There is no motivation behind what she does, it is simple response, cause and effect. This is pretty scientific, and while some people may understand that she has no good or evil force behind the environment's actions, it still does not lessen the trauma of what has happened to these folks and their lives, livelihoods, loved ones, homes, etc. As Adele learns at the end of the first book, her mother has spent most of Adele's life as a vampire, which makes Adele question whether her mother's actions were made out of love for Adele, instead of purely abandoning her daughter.

Adele's best friend, Brooke, and her family decide to move to Los Angeles at the beginning signs of trouble during the Storm, and after consideration decide to stay there. While the book does not go into detail, one can imagine that the characters feel a forced displacement and abandonment of their home, even if they are able to prosper in a new city. Brooke and Adele now live different, separate lives, of which Adele says, "I mostly told her about Isaac, because there was certainly nothing else in my life I could tell her about, other than the bleak state of the city. For her it was still shocking; for us it was just . . . life" (1:177).

Adele's labyrinth comprises multiple spaces and layers. Even four months after her return she notes that "the neighborhood still looked exactly as it had the day my father and I drove in after the evacuation. The postapocalyptic-zombie vibe crept up with a vengeance" (2: 27). Antero Garcia notes that "post-apocalyptic world-building" is becoming a larger feature in Young Adult literature, and "act[s] as a zeitgeist of the current climate in America, politically, civically, and culturally" (3). While Adele navigates her hometown, now foreign to her after all the changes it has undergone, she also learns how to navigate her burgeoning magic abilities, all of which ask her to build a new world in New Orleans, while she is at the same time learning how to build the world as a young teenager, mostly on her own.

Absent Mothers

Motherless children is perhaps the origin story of the Casquette Girls. One of the conditions of becoming a Casket Girl was also being an orphan. The women came without parents and with the expectation of obtaining a husband and producing children. In many ways, these women were alone in the world, without anyone tied to them, but conversely, with the expectations of being tied to others. Being without parents in Arden's series, however, is much more interesting than what happened in history, namely taking up residence in the Salpêtrière in Paris. As Adeline relays, "Like me, the triplets are sixteen years of age, and they too lost their mother early on, but even worse, they also lost their father and were made wards of the state at the age of seven. At thirteen, they ran away from the orphanage to join a traveling theatre troupe, which eventually received an invitation to perform at the palace" wherein they gave regular performances for the king of France (1: 213).

Antero Garcia writes of the absence of parents that, "[...] even though parents are largely absent from the main stories that are sold and shared with kids, they are usually perceived as a

powerful presence in YA" (66). Parents indeed, though mothers on the whole, are lacking in *The Casquette Girls*. Adele and Isaac are both lacking their mothers. Adele's mother, Brigitte, is unavailable to her daughter on multiple levels, emotionally, geographically, and in terms of being undead. She first absents herself when she abruptly moves back to Paris twelve years before the start of the novel when Adele is four; the reasons for which are not disclosed until later in the book. Isaac's mother has passed away from breast cancer, and in her place, he has his cold, unfeeling father ordering him around. Dee's mother, Ann Marie, is alive and present in Dee's life, though not as present as her grandmother, Ritha who plays a prominent role in Dee's life and in the novels. Codi and his two brothers have their fathers, but no mother to speak of. Annabelle Lee Drake, the traitorous coven member, has parents, but rarely, if ever, speaks of them.

Fathers tend to play larger, more prominent roles in the book. Mac is ever-present in the novel, taking care of Adele and making sure she is well looked after. Adeline Saint-Germain keeps a journal for her father, and every entry that exists is for his eyes, thus keeping him present and a perpetual spectator in the novel. The male Medici vampires, despite originally becoming vampires via a bite from a female named Séraphine Cartier, sire subsequent vampires and bring them into the fold. In this way, the mother begins to be absent from the novels as the men are able to reproduce their kind.

Ruth Bienstock Anolik writes in her essay, "The Absent Mother: Negotiations of Maternal Presence in the Gothic Mode," that, "The typical Gothic mother is absent: dead, imprisoned, or somehow abjected, to use the term that Julia Kristeva applies to that state of being, 'neither subject nor object,' which she associates with 'our earliest attempts to release the hold of *maternal* entity'" and she then quickly goes on to add, "Those Gothic mothers who are

not actually dead are effaced by their husbands or other representatives of the patriarchy in some way; immurement is a favorite method" (Staub 96). In the case of the novels examined in this section, the mothers are often immured in caskets, either as expired vampires or as deceased mortals, or immortalized in bronze statues.

Mothers – or rather the lack of mothers – play a prominent role in Alys Arden's series. Ricœur's elaboration of the Greek term *eikōn* is especially helpful for this particular set of novels as the translation means, "the presence of an absent thing" (6). There is an omniscient presence of mothers and of the founding mothers, even as they are not seen in the novels. Adele's mother, Brigitte, is perhaps the epitome of *eikōn* in this novel: she presents as human though she is undead as a vampire, thus appearing present, but in fact quite absent.

Adele's mother is locked in the attic with other vampires and while not necessarily immured, certainly locked in a larger than life casket for all of them. Adele also blames herself for her mother being stuck in the attic, which will ultimately result in Adele letting her out as well. Adele navigates the typical gothic genre through her mother. "Of course, I couldn't think about Émile without thinking about Brigitte, and after that I was hardly able to look at Isaac, knowing I'd lied to him about what happened in the attic on Halloween. About my mother being trapped inside. About my mother being a vampire" (2: 30).

Brigitte does make cameos in the story, though not as many as via the stories told about her through Adele and Mac's memories, and especially through Adele's hurt and anger towards her mother. Adele notes, "'Forget about her' was a mantra I'd been telling myself for the last twelve years in regard to my mother. Every year it got easier. I said the mantra on every birthday when she didn't call, every Mother's Day when I had no one to celebrate with, and every Christmas when it was just me and my dad, until she rarely crossed my mind. The only reminder

of her was the sadness in my father's eyes" (2: 46). By invoking the thought of her mother on all the holidays, Adele does keep her mother alive in her heart and mind, even if she feels betrayed and abandoned by her.

In her book, *Death and the Mother From Dickens to Freud: Victorian Fiction and the Anxiety of Origins*, Carolyn Dever maps out the importance of the mother and her absence in the Victorian novel and the effect it has on her children. (As Victorian literature comes after Gothic literature and can incorporate many of the same characteristics of Gothic literature, it seems appropriate to use Dever's theories and arguments.) Dever writes:

> The mother's absence creates a mystery for her child to solve, motivating time and again the redefinition – in the absence of role-models – of female decorum, gender roles, and sexuality. In the absence of the mother, the child is left with a personal mystery, too, that motivates a formal search for 'origins' in narratives ranging from the orphan discovering the truth of family history to the natural philosopher explicating, in somewhat larger terms, the origin of species (xi).

In terms of Arden's series, the present-day characters are always searching to get back to their ancestors who were the founders of the Casquette Girls Coven. Arden's series differs from other novels related to the Casket Girls in that the main characters are the descendants of the founding mothers, instead of the mothers themselves (the original Casquette Girls coven did not contain actual Casket Girls) thereby proving that the state project was successful in establishing a lasting lineage in the colony.

While the founding mothers do play a pivotal role in the series in terms of beginning the mystery and coming back to help resolve it, the action and drama centers on their present-day descendants. In the novels examined in the past chapter, the progeny of the Casket Girls was

either incredibly young or non-existent. In some cases, the authors do not focus on the re/production of families for which the young women were sent, but rather merely gesture towards children. This is also the case in *The Casquette Girls* series, though we are able to see their contemporary lineage, and can see the two generations interact.

At the end of the first book, Adele works with her coven of Isaac and Desirée to lock four vampires in the attic of the Ursuline church. One of the vampires who is locked away and under a slumbering spell is none other than Adele's mother. It is right at this crucial point in the novel where she has to lock them away for good when Adele learns that her mother is a vampire and not mortal. This throws everything she has ever believed into flux - did her mother really abandon her, or did she try to protect her? Does this explain her mother's sudden departure from their lives? Who is her assistant, Emilio/Émile *really* to her? And most importantly - how can she reconcile the fact that her mother is a monster, as Adele believes vampires are monsters and that she should never trust them? "There was no way I could tell [Isaac] about my mother. He hated vampires. There was no way I could tell *anyone*" (1: 543). "*Isaac saw my mother. And he thinks she's Giovanna Medici*" (1: 544).

The juxtaposition between human and monster is striking. Arden humanizes Brigitte by allowing her this moral conflict of the should-be self-sacrificing mother but quickly shifts to the animalistic mode, in which all sense of pathos and ethos disappears to pure animalistic need. This provides a nice moment to ask the question about the thin line between humanity and monsters. The Southern Gothic genre utilizes tropes of fear, the supernatural, and immurement to address larger societal concerns. Smith and Moruzi write, "The Gothic is constantly being reinvented in ways that address the current historical moment, as is the cultural construction of monstrosity which is historically conditioned" (Braudy 9). Nina Auerbach says, "Vampires are

neither inhuman nor nonhuman nor all-too-human; they are simply more alive than they should be" (6). Arden may agree with this depiction of vampires as the ones that show up in her novels are mostly considerate and kind.

As Anolik writes, "The tendency in Western culture to perceive and represent the figure of the woman as absolutely good or absolutely evil, as either virgin or whore, is pervasive and is reflected in the Gothic representation of women: the evil Prioress and the innocent Agnes are but one of many doubled pairs in the Gothic that exemplify this paradigm" (99). The conflict that Adele feels in knowing that her mother, who was very much human before she left twelve years ago, is a vampire is palpable in the first book. It is this tension that drives the narrative for much of the second book as well. After the vampires have been locked in the convent attic, their own casket, Adele looks for a way to free her mother, though she remains unable to reconcile the fact that her mother is indeed a vampire, and thus dead. This aporia – the logical contradiction – parallels what Smith and Moruzi write as, "the general trend in postmodern Gothic fiction to collapse the opposition between good and evil, with vampires often being depicted as empathetic, loving creatures, while humans are exposed 'as capable of being equally murderous as vampires' (Smith, 2013, p. 192)" (12-13).

As Nina Auerbach says, "vampires blend into the changing cultures they inhabit. They inhere in our most intimate relationships; they are also hideous invaders of the normal. I am writing about vampires because they can be everything we are, while at the same time, they are fearful reminders of the infinite things we are not" (6). In the case of New Orleans and the Storm, vampires are a reminder that death surrounds the characters; whether due to the people who have been lost to the natural disaster, or due to being a teenager who is alive but may not feel like they are living. The novels provide a sense of death and the dead being misplaced.

Katrina's Imprint echoes that sentiment: "It is clear from these stories that there is something particularly powerful about these misplaced dead. Encounters with dead bodies cut through the surfaces of modern life, exposing something basic and visceral" (Wailoo 59).

"The Gothic was always a family affair, and the family it courted perpetually in decay" (Brabon & Genz 16). In The Casquette Girls series the entire premise is based around the fact that the story is a family affair, both of actual bloodlines, and of family of choice. Each of the members of the contemporary Casquette Girls coven are related by blood to the original Casquette Girls coven, and various witching families make up the other groups in the book, such as the Medicis and the Salazars. The series examines and exemplifies difficult questions that the characters have to answer. Adele frequently battles with herself over a myriad of contradictions. There are two big oppositions for Adele in the series, and they deal with relationships to others. There is the ever-present conflict in love interest, the heroic Isaac, and the bad-boy Nicco, but the most incongruous relationship for Adele is with her mother, Brigitte, the vampire, but also her mother-who is still a vampire.

Their relationship is best highlighted in the scene where Adele has released the vampires from the attic to help defeat an evil witching family, the Salazars, who came to New Orleans to regain their power and take over the witching world. Adele loses her power to the leader, Callis, but just before he takes Adele's magic she is able to release the metal bindings to the attic and frees the vampires. The vampires have been in a 3 month slumber and have been literally starving since being trapped. Brigitte's animal instincts take over and she prepares to attack a helpless Codi, sitting in the corner of a classroom in the Ursuline convent with a broken leg. "Mrs. Le M-Moyne–?" Codi asks (2: 555). This is the first time the reader sees Brigitte addressed as Mac's wife. While they are technically still married, generally Brigitte is depicted

from the viewpoint of Adele, who calls her mother by her first name, refers to her in the third person, or calls her "my mother." Codi then tries to save his life by appealing to Brigitte's human side, hoping that it will overpower the animalistic need to save herself by recalling the fact that he and her daughter are friends, and that when she and Adele was a little girl, they would visit him in the tearoom, and Brigitte would drink chamomile tea.

The description of Brigitte during this interaction shows pure vampiric need, notably for sustenance. Her only link to humanity is the fact that her body looks human, yet it is the host to a vampire. Brigitte's existence is ambivalent and ambiguous in this moment. She appears human, but is a vampire. The lines of existence are blurred. Brigitte is shown with "skin silvery in the pale moonlight. She was breathing heavily, her shoulders heaving, as if she were fighting herself" (2: 555). Her description turns animalistic as "She was barefoot, and blood dripped from her fingertips" (2: 556). Brigitte remains locked in a primal illustration until the novel reads, "My mother leaned over him, and his eyes watered as he looked back up to her. I couldn't see her face, but I knew her fangs were out by the way Codi coiled. She knelt down–" (2: 556). In this instant, the moment before Brigitte is about to inflict her power on Codi, Adele stops using words like "she" or "her" but instead turns to "my mother." She has already called out, "mom" to Brigitte, but there is a turn in the narration. Adele is unable to see the animal who is taking care of their hunger, but instead switches her perspective to see her mother, about to hurt her childhood friend.

In another attempt to appeal to whatever human rationality is left in Brigitte, Adele calls out to her, "Mom?" (2: 556). Adele begs her not to hurt Codi, and in a last-ditch effort to save him, Adele cuts herself, making herself bleed and in the reader sees her thoughts, "*She's my mom; she won't kill me*" (2: 556 emphasis in original). And yet, as the scene shows, Brigitte is

not in a place to control her cravings, she turns from Codi to Adele. The distinction between human and monster is then heavily contrasted in the paragraphs that follow. Adele even sees herself in the vampire saying, “She looked like a slightly taller, vampiric version of me, and it was terrifying” (2: 556). Perhaps the reason Adele finds this “terrifying” is because she can see monstrosity within herself, or because she knows being a monster can be part of the human experience.

Adele calls out to her mother for the third time, using the title, “mom,” and then shares:

> A tear dripped down her cheek into the blood–it was the most emotion my mother had ever shown me, as far as I could remember.
>
> She stepped closer. I held my arms out to her, tears pouring down my face. *I can survive a vampire bite if it comes to that. Adeline did. Morning Star did.*
>
> That’s what I told myself as I caught the look in her eyes–the begging for forgiveness–just before they glossed over like Nicco’s predatory stare (2: 556 emphasis in original).

Adele’s belief in her foremothers, Adeline, who is directly from her bloodline, and Morning Star, who is part of the original Casquette Girls coven, can be perceived as either superhuman in her own way, or naïve. Both of the original members were bitten by vampires and survived, so Adele believes that she will also be protected, perhaps by a magical lineage, and able to come back from the experience like they did. It is also possible that Adele is already delusional and deluded from a loss of blood and not thinking clearly.

The juxtaposition of human-monster is underscored in this passage, from the tear Brigitte sheds, to the glossed-over look in her eyes that occurs just before she satiates her need for sustenance. Adele is convinced that her mother is in the vampire and that Brigitte will surely win

out over any predatory instincts the vampire may feel towards her. The language used in the passage for Brigitte as a vampire positions her as a monster who has complete control over their actions. Her stare is described as “predatory” and her eyes “glossed over” before she went in for the figurative kill.

Brigitte takes generously from Adele’s blood supply, and it is true that she does not kill Adele, but it is impossible to know if she would have ended up doing so. At a pivotal moment, Isaac and Nicco rush in to save Adele from Brigitte, each with different ideas of how to do so, but the ultimate decision is made when Isaac uses his air power to put a stake in Brigitte’s back and ends her eternal life. This is the last time that Brigitte will appear in the novel, from here on out she becomes Ricœur’s *eikōn*, or Kristeva’s abject – appearing as an absent thing. Brigitte returns to existing in an interstitial space, one in which she is simultaneously there and not there, a memory, a thought, a statue, but never in a body, no longer existing in any form to have a relationship with Adele. In essence, Brigitte's character undergoes a transformation in the narrative. She transitions from being a physically present character to becoming an eikōn or an abject entity, a representation or presence that is not fully corporeal. She exists in an interstitial space, blurring the boundaries between presence and absence, memory, and reality. Brigitte's character serves as a symbol of the complex relationship dynamics and emotional themes in the novel, illustrating how her absence and transformed existence impact her relationship with Adele.

After Isaac stakes Brigitte, one must again ask about the relationship between human and monster. It was his instinct to save the girl he loves, but the reader also knows of his disgust of vampires. Therefore, is Isaac the monster for killing for his own desire (to save his girlfriend), or is Brigitte who was killing (she may have stopped and saved Adele, but we will never know) in

order to survive? It is within the realm of possibility that Isaac is both a hero and a monster. When the original Casquette Girl coven was rescuing Marassa Makandal from Saint Domingue, her brother and Adeline found themselves in a field with a foreman who had detected them. Adeline witnessed the foreman beat Makandal, but he was saved by a vampire who killed the foreman, to which the vampire replied, "every species has its monsters" (1: 324).

The repercussions of Isaac's decision and action ripple throughout the rest of the series. Adele's first reaction is shock, "*No. No. No. She can't be dead. She's a vampire*" (2: 558 emphasis in original). With this, any hope that Adele had for rekindling a relationship with her mother, for having a mother at all, is gone. Previous to this moment, Adele had suffered years of feeling abandoned by her mother, until three months earlier, when she found out that her mother was a vampire. Knowing that there was a reason for the abandonment, and that the reason was to protect the family, and thus out of love for her daughter, Adele is able to start to repair some of the damage of the past 12 years. However, this is all taken away and her emotional wound forever opened, unlike the fang bites from her mother and scar where Nicco healed Adele from Brigitte's bite. The bite and scar are erased, and Adele has no visible marker of the events of that evening. Her scars are, and will remain, internal to her body, invisible to others.

Arden pulls back in the urban legend of the college students who were killed in 1976 while filming the convent through Mac's memories in a conversation with Adele, "She told me what happened. How this Emilio Medici brought her back to life, and how she killed those students. She told me she'd never forgive herself for walking down the street that night when I'd always told her not to walk through the Quarter after dark by herself" (2: 572). He goes on to recount how Brigitte bit him the next day in order to wipe the memories from his mind and does not understand the sudden influx of memories he is currently experiencing. Adele must then tell

her dad that Brigitte died, and the vampiric thrall she had used then on Mac was now invalid, which is why he could suddenly remember what happened twelve years ago. This description of Brigitte as a wife, a person, as present, is jarringly different from how she has been seen up to this point, either as absent or monster. The more monstrous she becomes in the novel, the more empathetic Adele is able to feel towards her.

As Mac processes the death and loss of his wife, he tells Adele, "I'm so, so sorry, baby. It's hard to explain–hard to admit–it was never real to me before. I always believed she was going to come home one day. Knowing she never will…" (3: 12). Adele is figuratively buried alongside her mother by his words and feelings, believing that it was ultimately her fault that her mother died since she was one responsible for opening the attic door the night her mother was killed. She explains, "Every sentence crushed me a little deeper into the ground. Each word was dirt spraying on my face, mud shoveling on top of my chest. My legs. My arms. My shoulders. Into my mouth and throat choking me. *She didn't leave us; she died!*" (3: 12). It seems that not only does Adele carry the legacy of the Casquette Girls with her, but also the legacy of her mother. Despite the distance of their relationship, Adele feels the results of her actions towards her mother very acutely. Adele embodies many of the gothic genre's characteristics by proxy, via her mother: the monstrosity, the immurement, the darkness, the in-betweenness of existence as human and vampire.

Isaac wants nothing more than to protect the girl he loves, and to be the object of her affections, and yet his actions drive them apart. "Isaac had killed my mom" (2: 571) is a line that Adele often repeats. The third book opens with this very sentiment, "My eyes stung. Brigitte and I never had a semblance of a relationship, and now we never would. I don't know why I ever thought I could save her. My mother and I never stood a chance" (3: 7). Isaac has an opposing

point of view. To him, vampires are monsters, lack humanity and empathy, and are not to be pitied. He narrates, “Brigitte had tried to kill her own daughter! That’s how repugnant these monsters were” (3: 36). While he feels badly for killing Adele’s mother, he did not know who she was and only saw her as a monster, not as Adele’s mother. Isaac feels vindicated in his actions because he saved Adele from being killed.

The coven agrees with Isaac in that Adele would have died had he not intervened. Adele, however, has a hard time seeing her mother how her friends do, as a monster. This is a critical moment in which one can repose the question of who or what counts as a monster, or monstrous? Adele has made choices that put her coven and community at risk (i.e. letting vampires out of the attic), but despite her emotional nature, she is able to self-reflect and weigh her decisions and actions. Adele can, and frequently does, exist in a grey area, whereas Isaac exists in black and white terms. His inflexibility could be his undoing as he sees things in one specific way and has a hard time having empathy. Adele is able to see past the façade of Nicco as a vampire, though she does respect and understand the power he holds as a vampire. Isaac sees Nicco as a threat both because he is a vampire and because he also loves Adele, thus posing a threat to his own masculinity and self.

Underlying this discussion is the idea of what a vampire is and is not. As Nina Auerbach writes, “[vampires] can be everything we are, while at the same time, they are fearful reminders of the things we are not” (6). For Adele, Brigitte is like a hologram, she can see the woman who was her mother, can engage and interact with her, but cannot actually have her mother. Brigitte as vampire reminds Adele that she is a motherless child and will never have that coveted and celebrated relationship, a relationship for which Adele longs, and has grieved the majority of her life. For Isaac, he is not the sole object of Adele’s love. He has to share this unwieldy place with

Nicco, a vampire who has what he wants, seemingly without having put in any work to get the girl.

Brigitte is also the inspiration behind the bronze ballerina statue at Adele's school of the arts, and on top of Brigitte's tomb in the cemetery is an angel who is "shielding her eyes as if watching out for predators" (4: 122). Adele has often spent time sitting at the base of the ballerina since her childhood, never understanding or realizing why it was such a comfortable place for her. In this unmovable statue she is able to receive a sustained, steady supply of support and consistency that her actual mother was never able to give her. Indeed, throughout the book, Adele yearns for her absent mother. The presence of the bronze ballerina statue and the angel on Brigitte's tomb serve as powerful symbols of this yearning. The ballerina, inspired by Brigitte, becomes a source of comfort and familiarity for Adele, even though she cannot fully comprehend why. This unchanging statue provides Adele with the kind of enduring support and consistency that her actual mother was unable to provide. It represents a physical manifestation of her longing for the maternal care and connection she missed in her relationship with Brigitte. She has previously seen sketches and a two-foot model of the statue in her father's workshop, as he created and gifted the statue to her school, but Adele had never seen under the mask, until she needs to use it for Halloween, when the new coven planned to re-trap the vampires in the attic. She removes the mask and put it on herself and then remarked:

> When I looked up through the mask, I found my mother staring back at
>
> me, perfectly re-created in bronze.
>
> *What?*
>
> She has been hidden by the mask.
>
> Frozen in time.
>
> With me all of these years.

Indeed, Brigitte has been there, but inaccessible to Adele. Her secrets have remained hidden, and by the time everything comes to light, it is too late. Brigitte will only ever be there for Adele in her thoughts and memories, always as an eikōn, present in her absence.

The magical climax in book 4 sees the original Casquette Girl coven, the modern Casquette Girl coven, and most of the Medici family witches and vampires in the afterworld attempting to take down the Salazar family during a heightened moment where the Salazar patriarch uses his spektral magic against the other great families in attendance. His spektral power (a secondary power to either air, water, earth, fire, or aether) is that of a succubus; he has the ability to siphon powers from others. The Medici matriarch casts a spell in which Salazar's power will be used against him, thus giving the power back to those he was stealing it from. This results in Salazar fading in and out of existence and anyone in his bloodline would also lose their magic forever. Nicco realizes this as he watches Adele blink in and out of the theater. He rushes to her and explains that she shares a bloodline with the Salazar family and eviscerating his magic means eviscerating her own. Given that the Salazar family has caused immeasurable hurt to everyone Adele knows, the thought of being related to them evokes a very strong reaction in her. "'I will never be one of them!' *And I will kill one man to save the rest*" (4: 455). In this ultimate show of girl power, Adele demonstrates, once again, that she is willing and able to sacrifice herself for the good and benefit of others. Indeed, as demonstrated throughout the book, the women sacrifice for others (Brigitte leaves her daughter so that she can have a chance at a good life, Adele offers herself up to a vampire to save her friend, Codi, Dee heals others back to health despite difficult rebounds to her own health, Mama Medici casts a spell to protect the entire audience in the afterworld show), while the men – although appearing altruistic – make decisions to their own benefit (Mac stays late at his bar working every night leaving his daughter home

alone in a post-Storm New Orleans, Isaac is reckless in his actions despite wanting to protect Adele and kills her mother, Emilio only does what benefits him without regard to others). Despite sharing a bloodline with a family that can be considered monstrous, Adele's willingness to sacrifice for the good of everyone else, even to her own detriment, is remarkable.

As a modern heroine and descendant of a very specific set of Casquette Girls, Adele defies traditions and expectations. She challenges these expectations by asserting her independence, pursuing her own goals, and actively participating in the supernatural conflicts of her world. She refuses to conform to the passive or submissive roles often assigned to women in traditional narratives. Instead, she takes agency in shaping her destiny and the world around her. This defiance of traditional gender roles and expectations is a central theme in her character development throughout the narrative. She is reckless, impulsive, and the antithesis of her mother. If Alys Arden has indeed written a, "very Louisiana novel" as she says in her interview with Parish Ascension Library, then readers are to glean that New Orleanian women are independent, self-sufficient, and more likely to take a vampire as a significant other than a human. Adele can be considered a postfeminist heroine, but under a very specific condition: because she willingly falls in love with a vampire, Nicco, who has traditionally been cast as the oppressive patriarchy. If we consider that postfeminism is an attractive contradiction in itself where a woman willing gives herself over to the chains that bind her, then Adele is certainly a postfeminist heroine.

Southern Gothic

Thomas Ærvold Bjerre, for The Oxford Research Encyclopedia, defines the Southern Gothic as being characterized by irrational, horrific, and transgressive elements, grotesque characters, dark humor, and an underlying sense of alienation. It is closely related to the English

and American Gothic traditions but is uniquely influenced by the South's tensions and aberrations. Bjerre also notes that Charles Crow has observed that during the 20th century, the South emerged as the primary hub of American Gothic literature. This genre of literature reveals the darker aspects of the supposedly idyllic Southern past, which conceals the region's troubling historical realities, including slavery, racism, and patriarchy. In Southern Gothic texts, these historical truths resurface symbolically through ghosts, unveiling the unspoken aspects of southern history.

The feeling of isolation mentioned above works well with Young Adult fiction as, according to Antero Garcia, "Looking historically at YA, outsiders are a common presence. The salient theme of feeling like one doesn't belong is one that youth readily identify with" (59). Leo Braudy writes that, "the gothic novel is filled with anxiety about the past" (215). This particular tension–anxiety of the past constructed in the present–is ever present in the series; the narrative shifts back and forth between the present (interpreted as the 21st century) and the eighteenth century.

"In gothic fiction the most all-enveloping and immediate way the past makes its appearance is in the discovery of the story itself, and the most prevalent method of making the supernatural story seem real is the device of the discovered manuscript" (Braudy 216). Adeline's journal serves precisely this purpose. Discovered while cleaning out the attic to serve as her new bedroom, Adele feels drawn to a space beneath the floorboards in her closet. "I hastily cast the floorboards aside and peered into the dark hole, like a child about to discover a treasure. […] Without thinking, I thrust my hand into the hole and grabbed it. […] I raised an eyebrow at the leather-bound object[.] *All that trouble for a book?*" (1:181). As Adele, and the reader, finds out, it is not simply "a book" that she discovers, but rather a journal from 1728, a journal written by

her ancestor, Adeline Saint-Germain, and–in fact–a grimoire for the coven. The journal needs to be translated from French by Adele to be understood, thus lending credibility to the journal's authenticity and Adele's authenticity as someone of French heritage and her knowledge of French. The reader learns, alongside Adele, of Adeline's adventures in her letters to her father. As Arden notes in her interview with Ascension Parish Library, "having two different timelines and going back and forth between them is the only way to solve the mystery of the book. […] The clues that you're gonna need to solve the mystery are in the historical parts of the book" (15:43-17:06).

"Each manuscript leads back in the past to another source, and the original tale can be grasped only through a succession of veils. Like the wary traveler in front of a dark foreboding mansion, the reader cannot cross into the world of darkness and terror directly, but only by the tenuous bridge of old, retold stories" (Braudy 217). It is precisely this technique that allows readers to grasp the entirety of the series as Adeline Saint-Germain's journal combined with the coven's discussions weave the story together. With Adele, readers witness and experience the terrifying story of an encounter between some of the original Casket Girls and a *strigoi* (vampire) aboard their ship sailing to Louisiana. Adeline describes having to hide under the covers of night in order to discover the monster aboard the ship who was terrorizing passengers, taking victims at will and never leaving clues as to when they would strike next.

> Night after night we have waited, hiding behind doors, behind barrels, and in piles of rope. Tonight, Cosette lost her patience and moved from her hiding spot, sauntering across the deck. It took only a minute before his silhouette drew from the shadows. The creature moved closer to her, causing the three of us to pop up. In an instant, he ran across the deck and then straight up the sail like a spider, leaping across the masts, higher

> and higher, and then he stopped, almost midleap, and slowly twisted in our direction, nothing more than a shadowy figure against the moon. (1: 237-238).

After presenting Adele with a painting of the original Casquette Girls, Desirée also produces a half-translated grimoire from her ancestor, Marassa Makandal. Adele says, "I know all about translating old French text . . . I've been translating Adeline Saint-Germain's diary—" to which Desirée reacts in disbelief and Adele replies, "Is that really so weird? You just pulled out a three-hundred-year-old spell book" (1: 306). Discovering these texts together, along with Isaac's when he realizes that his beloved sketchbook is his family grimoire, allows the young coven to dig deeper into the past to understand their ancestors' stories. As the stories are revealed in the present, Adele, Dee, and Isaac begin to understand why they are brought together and how they must work together to resolve the problems of the past. As the coven pieces together their ancestors' history via their grimoires, the founding mothers also become present despite their absence.

The Renaissance

Another aspect of the novel that becomes present for the reader, despite its absence, is the Renaissance. The inclusion of the famous Italian Renaissance Medici family in the novels may appear unconventional, especially in a vampire-themed narrative. However, as Leo Braudy discusses in his analysis of Dracula in *Haunted: On ghosts, witches, vampires, zombies, and other monsters of the natural and supernatural*, there is a compelling fascination with incorporating Renaissance characters into such narratives, driven by the idea of rediscovering the past (204). The term *renaissance,* itself translating to "rebirth" in English, aligns with the historical period's focus on rejuvenation and revival, and the Medici family in the novel worked in the arts and sciences with the hopes of finding eternal life.

During the Renaissance in Italy and France, writers, artists, and scientists sought to emulate and surpass the accomplishments of ancient civilizations, particularly the Roman Republic. This took form in the quarrel between the Ancients and Moderns. Braudy writes that the European Renaissance, often seen as a herald of a new future, paradoxically drew inspiration from the cultural and political past, particularly the Roman republic of the early centuries B.C. Renaissance luminaries, including artists and thinkers, looked back to this ancient world, both emulating and surpassing it (204-205). He says that this duality of reinvigorating the past to fuel the present and shape a new future led to a century-long intellectual debate in the 17th century, known as the conflict between the Ancients and the Moderns (204-205).

Braudy notes that the core of this debate revolved around whether the present was an improvement over the past or merely a footnote to its former grandeur. The responses often depended on one's field of expertise: writers and artists argued for the wisdom of the past, while scientists and medical professionals touted the superiority of their understanding of the physical world. The 17th century, marked by advancements in astronomy, chemistry, physics, biology, and mathematics, saw significant progress in the sciences.

Nonetheless, Braudy argues, even the emerging generation of scientists held a certain reverence for the ancients (204-205). Sir Isaac Newton, for instance, acknowledged that his discoveries were built upon the work of his predecessors, and he dedicated substantial intellectual effort to establishing a parallel timeline linking key events in the classical and biblical worlds. Regardless of whether one aligned with the Ancients or the Moderns, Braudy says, they shared a common disdain for the Middle Ages, increasingly referred to as the "dark ages" by the end of the 17th century, a period characterized as barbaric rather than the "civilization" championed by advocates of both sides (204-205).

Much of what Braudy says about the different factions being in opposition against a common enemy is pertinent to *The Casquette Girls* series. Witches and vampires alike fight together to take down ghost drinkers (who are also an ancient witch family, the Salazars, who turned away from good magic to dark magic). It is also quite literally the dark ages in *The Casquette Girls*, as the Storm has wiped everything out, (and in an interesting contrast, Adele's powers center around fire, and light). Everyone in New Orleans is looking forward to a new future, one in which the city might be able to build itself back better, after the devastation of the Storm, and, for the vampires, one in which they are able to escape the city limits and return to their original mission of finding and securing their magic.

In terms of renaissance, there is also the notable rebirth for the vampires, leaving their human form and becoming eternal beings. And yet they maintain their human form. As Nina Auerbach writes, "Because they are always changing, their appeal is dramatically generational" (5). The appeal in this case includes the Medici family of the Renaissance with impeccable taste in clothing, Italian accents, and a suave sophistication not found in Post-Storm New Orleans. They occupy an almost impossible space to be in at this time, and yet they also occupy the space with ease.

"Teenagers, not yet adults but no longer children, and vampires, not yet dead but no longer alive, both occupy a socially interstitial space which is used as the grounds for their affinity in the *Twilight* novels" (Taylor 36). In Arden's series, while both the teenagers of the coven and the vampires also occupy this interstitial space, it only sometimes creates grounds of affinity. In the space where the two groups meet, they are able to use the abilities of the other group to achieve their desired goals. The two groups complement each other in this way. The

vampires need the coven to break the spell so that they may return to Florence, and the coven needs the vampires to provide intel in order to beat the ghost drinkers.

Smith and Moruzi write, “As Jeffrey Cohen explains, ‘the monster is born only at this metaphoric crossroads, as an embodiment of a certain cultural moment-of a time, a feeling, and a place. The monster’s body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy…. The monstrous body is pure culture’” (9). In terms of Brigitte and Adele, the daughter wants to believe that even if her mother is a monster the maternal bond will overpower her vampiric needs and instincts. Adele flirts with the boundary between safety and love, and harm and danger, perhaps out of a need to heal childhood wounds, perhaps because she believes herself to be impermeable to actual peril or that the wounds her mother has already inflicted have done more harm than anything that could happen to her now.

Conclusion

Marita Woywod Crandle writes in her book, *New Orleans Vampires*, that, “This story of the Casket Girls has evoked interest from many individuals over the years, so much so that several fantastical novels have been written with varying angles on the fiction surrounding the story, including *Savage Lands* by Clare Clark, *The Last Casquette Girl* by Lorena Dureau, *The Lost Reflection* by Bruce Jones and *The Casquette Girls* by Alys Arden” (47). The Casket Girls are not as widely known as *les filles du roi*, given their small number (less than 50), and their distinct connection with New Orleans, however they have found their own niche in popular culture.

"The Originals," a spin-off tv show of "The Vampire Diaries," celebrates the legend of the Casket Girls during its annual Vampire Ball. In this event, a character named Rebekah is quoted as saying, "The Casket Girls legend lives on, now celebrated in typical New Orleans

fashion with stylish costumes and supernatural flair. It's a yearly reminder of how woman [sic] can be oppressed by selfish men and how they can triumph when brave enough to fight for themselves" (Fandom TV Community). For some, like the characters in this tv show, the Casket Girls are merely a fun embellishment of the supernatural with a hint of feminism, though there is a conversation of feminism to be had via these women which has been explored in this chapter. This portrayal adds a layer of feminism to the Casket Girls narrative, shedding light on the intersection of supernatural folklore and feminist themes.

CONCLUSION

Mother as unfinished business

> "There is a glaring need to restore to mother her own presence, to understand that she is a person, not merely an object for her child, to recognize her subjectivity"
>
> - Shari L Thurer (xii)

Shari L Thurer writes, "Motherhood is utterly sentimentalized" and that, "Mothers today cling to an ideal that can never be reached but somehow cannot be discarded" (iBook). The topic of mothers, mothering, motherhood is a multilayered, multifaceted, and intimate subject, and this dissertation only makes a soft scratch in a very large surface. I have attempted to show some of the ways in which the French founding mothers have been portrayed, their legacy inscribed in the French gynocolonial project that sent them to North America to be wives and mothers. Both *les filles du roi* and the Casket Girls can be seen as symbols of hope and new beginnings, encouraging a fruitful future. They can also be interpreted as representations of "Mother France," reproducing the homeland in the new land.

As Amos Funkenstein writes in his book, *Collective Memory and Historical Consciousness*, "In the collective memory of the past, people, events, and historic institutions serve as prototypes and are not recognized for their uniqueness. They are links in an ongoing past" (9). This dissertation sought to map a legacy of collective memory and imagination of the French founding mothers in North America. It aimed to introduce readers to an often unknown and understudied group of women and the literary productions that represent them. It explored the representations of *les filles du roi* and the Casket Girls with the goal of uncovering

contemporary anxieties and depictions of women in Quebec and American cultures. Understanding how women–and in this case, women meant to be wives and mothers–are portrayed in literature in specific situations (facing poverty or other hardships, interacting with children, navigating a romantic relationship), provides vital information to the reader on a cultural level, about who we think women are, how they should be seen, and what we expect from them.

The importance of women being able to make informed choices about their own bodies remains a vital aspect to life, not just in North America, but worldwide. Knowing that there were two programs to send French women to North America to populate and reproduce the state is, on the one hand fascinating, and on the other hand highly problematic and reductive. Women are more than their biological functions, though their ability to bring forth new life is indeed awe-inspiring. It is for this reason that reproduction needs to be respected and not misused for capitalist or neoliberal projects.

Les filles du roi exist within the Quebec imaginary as the founding mothers of a lasting nation, whose strength and determination have helped the community persevere through difficult and demanding times. Sergine Desjardins' novel, *Marie Major*, shows readers that mothers have to make difficult decisions for the well-being of their children, even when it means putting themselves in unfavorable positions. Marie is a heroine who sticks to her values, loves her son, is a good friend to others and educates women about their reproductive health. Her legacy continues through her descendants and now fans out to readers who are privy to her story, courtesy of one of her descendants, Sergine Desjardins.

The fascination and mythologization with founding mothers or women who are perceived as having birthed and raised a nation through their children is a tie that links descendants of

French founding mothers in North America. Somewhere between the awe experienced in watching a woman bring forth new life, and the idea of beginnings and origins, a reverence has evolved around *les filles du roi* as the founding mothers of Quebec. Mothers are subject to a heavily weighted idealization that demands nothing less than perfection. And yet, in Quebec culture, the "bad" mother is also achieving a prominent place in culture. One need only look at Diane from the 2014 film, "Mommy" or Germaine in Michel Tremblay's play, *Les belles-sœurs* to see their influence. And yet, despite what they are portrayed as lacking, there is still an ambiguity of character, and one sees hope of redemption, as well as a lot of love, in them. The recent ambiguous and ambivalent mother is portrayed in various ways in cultural productions, and never with a clear-cut sense – for the reader or the viewer – of entirely good or bad, right or wrong, like Marie and Anne, as I have shown in this chapter.

As we have seen in Gretchen Craig's *New Hope* series, postfeminism and romance novels work hand in hand to provide a seemingly empowered perception of women, while also subtly encouraging behaviors that align with the very system they wish to challenge. Current American social issues have been mapped onto the past in an effort to rectify the present. Social issues such as worker's rights, partner abuse, and loss of children show a contemporary community, able to come together and support each other, upholding a moral imperative. John Hall writes in his book, *The Sociology of Literature* that, "the most important characteristic of the romantic popular novel is its stress on upholding conventional morality" (94). The root of its conservatism can be conceived of as the stereotypical "traditional beliefs" one imagines of a society.

Romance novels are indeed a kind of *Catch-22*, while they allow, and encourage, a space for fruitful imagination of empowered women and positive relationships, they may also encourage the same kind of relationships that disempower women in reality. Feminists rightly

point out that postfeminism stakes itself in the claim that women play an active role in behaving, making choices, and existing as they desire; even when these choices objectify, sexualize, and place women in a subservient role to men. It is a seductive argument to say that women's liberation allows for women's choice, or to say that women love their roles as wives and mothers so much that they freely and willingly make the decision to stay in and embrace these roles. The woman can be anything she wants to be, so long as the family is her first, and top, priority, a view which Craig upheld in her novels.

The third chapter looks towards the second thread of Casket Girls literature: the Southern Gothic and Young Adult fiction. New Orleans and the Casket Girls provide a fertile ground for the creation – and re-creation – of the French imaginary in contemporary New Orleans. The chapter shows the effects of absent mothers on children and the necessity of community in combatting unseen and misunderstood enemies. It also raises questions of monstrosity, asking who can be considered a monster, and for what reasons. This chapter argues that the legacy of the founding mothers represents a long quest to get back to one's origins to root out problems that have caused incredible trauma, heal, and live a harmonious life. In order to reconcile with the recurrent problems, the characters must face the ways in which the problems are reproduced; shown via three versions of mothers in the series: mother nature, the absent mother, and vampires.

Mary Hilton and Maria Nikolajeva write of Young Adult fiction that, "Through sympathetically portraying the alienated pains and pleasures of adolescence, through *enacting* adolescence with all its turmoil, writers bring young readers face to face with different forms of cultural alienation itself: the legacy of colonialism, political injustice, environmental desecration, sexual stereotyping, consumerism, madness, and death" (1). Adele, as the teenage heroine,

reckons with several of the above categories, challenging many with her independent, rebellious perspective. Adele may represent the hope and expectations that adults place on youth to solve the current problems we are facing.

There are numerous avenues for future research and exploration within the subject matter and genres covered in this dissertation. One possibility lies in embracing Françoise Vergès' concept of femonationalism to shed light on the significant role played by the founding mothers of North, Central, and South America. By reevaluating the French founding mothers of North America, we can move beyond romanticizing their role and address the colonial aspects of the State project, avoiding the erasure of indigenous communities that predated the arrival of explorers and colonizers. While this dissertation touches on the connections between French colonists and indigenous populations, a deeper analysis of these representations is warranted.

Furthermore, there is a wealth of novels within the corpus of *les filles du roi*, providing ample material for analysis and commentary. Works such as Nicole Macé's *Marie Cardunier, fille du roy*, Renée Blanchet's *Marguerite Pasquier, fille du Roy*, Suzanne Martel's *Jeanne, fille du Roy*, and Rémi Tougas' *L'Allemande* (telling the story of the only German woman who managed to enter New France in an attempt to become a *fille du roi*) parallel Marie Major's narrative, offering opportunities to explore how these women are depicted in contemporary historical fiction in Quebec.

Another intriguing area of investigation centers around the relationship between the State and its control over women's bodies. Drawing upon Foucault's notions of docile bodies and biopolitics, we can delve deeper into the experiences of les filles du roi and the Casket Girls. Joan Dejean's book, "Mutinous Women," offers a rich source of information on the various ways in which the State apparatus wielded its power to send women to Louisiana for its own

advantage, a facet that deserves further exploration beyond the scope of this dissertation. These avenues of research promise to offer a more affirmative perspective on the broader implications and significance of the works and the figure of the mother in North American Franco imaginary within the larger North American culture. They also emphasize the enduring relevance of the narratives, showcasing how they continue to illuminate pressing issues in the present, such as the challenges of motherhood, stereotypes, and the state's control over women's bodies, which remain largely unchanged or in peril. This resilience and the revalorization of lost stories underscore the strength of historical novels in fostering a dialogue between the past and the urgent issues of the present moment.

Historically, women's voices and experiences have long been overshadowed, underrepresented, or disregarded in various realms of society, including literature, history, and culture. Women's writings about their own experiences provide a distinctive lens through which we can explore the issues affecting them. Moreover, it makes a significant contribution to dispelling harmful stereotypes and addressing gender-based inequalities. As Mary Gergen aptly points out in her chapter on narratives, "Stories teach people how to act with each other in their social groups. Stories shape people’s identities, provide them with appropriate goals, inform them of their social value, and teach them how to feel and think. Stories tell people what is meaningful, good, and worth caring about" (205) and also that, "a story becomes a framework for everything we think and do" (206).

Through the genre of historical fiction, authors such as Sergine Desjardins, Gretchen Craig, and Alys Arden have crafted narratives that empathetically portray the fictionalized experiences of the original French founding mothers, offering a valuable opportunity to delve deeper into their stories and ask a variety of questions regarding the representation of women,

mothers, and social issues. By exploring these narratives, we gain a clearer understanding of the resilience of women who faced adversity and overcame challenges. Their stories shed light on the enduring relevance of issues such as the pressures of motherhood, persistent stereotypes, and the state's control over women's bodies. These narratives not only serve as an exploration of the past but also open a dialogue about pressing contemporary issues. They underscore the importance of revaluing lost stories and highlight the enduring relevance of tales of resilience, which continue to be pertinent and relatable in the present moment.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A conversation with Alys Arden. YouTube, uploaded by Ascension Parish Library, 18 Dec. 2020, www.youtube.com/watch?v=c4-_PbLRCDM&t=37s.

Allain, Mathé. "L'immigration française en Louisiane, 1718-1721." *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française,* vol. 28, no. 4, March 1975, pp. 555-564.

Altman, Rick. *A Theory of Narrative*. New York, Columbia University Press, 2008.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities.* London, Verso, 2016.

Anderson, Stephanie, Halle Eisenman and Polli Kenn. Crash Course in Romance. NoveList, accessed 17 May 2023. Webinar slides.

Ankersmit, Frank. *Historical Representation.* Stanford University Press, 2001.
—. *Meaning, Truth, and Reference in Historical Representation.* Cornell University Press, 2012.

Appleby, Joyce, Lynn Hunt and Margaret Jacob. *Telling the Truth about History*. New York, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1994.

Arden, Alys. *The Casquette Girls.* New York, Skyscape, 2015.
—. *The Romeo Catchers.* New York, Skyscape, 2017.
—. *The Cities of Dead.* New Orleans, For the Art of It, 2019.
—. *The Gates of Guinée.* New Orleans, For the Art of It, 2020.

Ardoin, Bruce. "Notes and Documents: The *Baleine* Brides: A Missing Ship's Roll for Louisiana." *National Genealogical Society Quarterly,* no. 75, December 1987, pp. 303-5.

Atwood, Margaret. *The Handmaid's Tale. New York, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1986.*

Auerbach, Nina. *Our Vampires, Ourselves.* The University of Chicago Press, 1995.

Austin, David. "Narratives of power: historical mythologies in contemporary Quebec and Canada." *Race & Class,* vol. 52(1), 2010, pp. 19-32.

Bachelard, Gaston. *La Poetique de l'espace*. Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1961.

Bakhtin, M.M. *The Dialogic Imagination*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin, The University of Texas Press, 1991.

Banet-Weiser, Sarah. *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny.* Duke University Press, 2018.

Barthes, Roland. *Image, Music, Text*. Trans. Stephen Heath. New York, Hill and Wang, 1977.

Baumgardner, Jennifer. *Feminism in the 1990s*. Narrated by Jennifer Baumgardner, Audible, 2020. Audiobook.

Beaudry, Lucille, Carolina Ferrer and Jean-Christian Pleau, editors. *Art et politique: la representation en jeu*. Quebec City, Presses de l'Universite du Quebec, 2011.

Bédard, Éric. *L'Histoire du Québec pour les nuls*. Paris, Wiley Publishing, Inc., 2012.

Berger, Arthur Asa. *Narratives in Popular Culture, Media, and Everyday Life*. Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications, Inc., 1997.

Berland, Jody. *North of Empire*. Duke University Press, 2009.

Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism*. Duke University Press, 2011.
—.*The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship*. Duke University Press, 1997.

Berlatsky, Eric L. *The Real, the True, and the Told*. Columbus, The Ohio State University Press, 2011.

Best, Steven, and Douglas Kellner. *Postmodern Theory*. New York, The Guilford Press, 1991.

Blacker, Jean. *The Faces of Time*. The University of Texas Press, 1994.

Blanchot, Maurice. *L'espace Litteraire*. Paris, Gallimard, 1955.

Blumenthal, Walter Hart. *Brides from Bridewell: Female Felons sent to Colonial America*. Rutland, Vermont, Charles E. Tuttle Co., Inc., 1962.

Boccardi, Mariadele. "History as gynealogy: A.S. Byatt, Tracy Chevalier and Ahdaf Soueif." *Women: A Cultural Review*, vol. 15, no. 2, July 2004, pp. 192-203.

Bouchard, Gerard. *Social Myths and Collective Imaginaries.* Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2017.

Brabon, Benjamin, and Stéphanie Gentz, editors. *Postfeminist Gothic: Critical Interventions in Contemporary Culture.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Braudy, Leo. *Haunted: On ghosts, witches, vampires, zombies, and other monsters of the natural and supernatural worlds.* Yale University Press, 2016.

Brent, Joseph and Phyllis K Leffler. *Public and Academic History: A Philosophy and a Paradigm*. Malabar: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Co., Inc., 1990.

Brooks, Peter. *Realist Vision*. Yale University Press, 2005.

Brotton, Jerry. *The Renaissance: A Very Short Introduction.* New York, Oxford University Press, 2006.

Browning, John Edgar. "The real vampires of New Orleans and Buffalo: a research note towards comparative ethnography." *Palgrave Communications*, March 2015, pp. 1-8.

Canary, Robert H and Henry Kozicki, editors. *The Writing of History: Literary Form and Historical Understanding*. The University of Wisconsin Press, 1978.

Castillo Street, Susan and Charles L Crow editors. *The Palgrave Handbook of the Southern Gothic.* Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

Chapple, Richard (editor). *Social and Political Change in LIterature and Film*. University Press of Florida, 1994.

Charneux, Olivier. *Les guerir*. Paris, Editions Robert Laffont, 2016.

Chen, Angela. *The Verve*. 5 October 2018. 27 April 2019. <https://www.theverge.com/2018/10/5/17940650/how-history-gets-things-wrong-alex-rosenberg-interview-neuroscience-stories>.

Choquette, Leslie. *Frenchmen into Peasants : Modernity and Tradition in the Peopling of French Canada.* Harvard University Press, 1997.

Confino, Alon. "Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method." *The American Historical Review,* vol. 102, no. 5, Dec 1997, pp. 1386-1403.

Craig, Grechen. *Here Will I Remain.* Self-published, Kindle ed., 2016.
—. *What We May Be.* Self-published, Kindle ed., 2017.

Crandle, Marita Woywod. *New Orleans Vampires: History and Legend.* Charleston, Haunted America, 2017.

Davis, Natalie Zemon. *Fiction in the Archives*. Stanford University Press, 1987.
—. *The Return of Martin Guerre*. Harvard University Press, 1983.

Dawson, Nelson. "Les filles du roi: des pollueuses? La France du XVIIe siècle." *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques,* Spring 1985, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 9-38.

De Groot, Jerome. *The Historical Novel.* London, Routledge, 2010.
—. *Remaking History.* Routledge, 2016.

DeJean, Joan. *Mutinous Women.* New York, Basic Books, 2022.

Della Coletta, Cristina. *Plotting the Past*. Purdue University Press, 1996.

Desjardins, Sergine. *Marie Major.* Laval, Guy Saint-Jean Editeur, 2006.

Desrochers, Suzanne. *Bride of New France.* New York, W.W. Norton & Company, 2011.

Doyle, Sady. *Dead Blondes and Bad Mothers.* Brooklyn, Melville House Publishing, 2019.

Dever, Carolyn. *Death and the Mother From Dickens to Freud: Victorian Fiction and the Anxiety of Origins.* Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Douglas, Susan J., and Meredith W Michaels. *The Mommy Myth.* New York, Free Press, 2004.

Drévillon, Hervé and Diego Venturino, editors. *Penser et vivre l'honneur à l'époque moderne*. Presses universitaires de Rennes 2011.

Dumas, Sylvio. *Les filles du roi en Nouvelle France: Étude historique avec répertoire biographique.* Québec, La Société Historique de Québec, 1972.

Dureau, Lorena. *The Last Casquette Girl.* New York City, Pinnacle Books, 1981.

Edelman, Lee. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive.* Duke University Press, 2004.

Enelow-Snyder, Sarah. "I list my 'income' from 13-hour days of parenting on my family's budget." Business Insider, December 2, 2022, https://www.businessinsider.com/personal-finance/list-sahm-income-family-budget-2022-10.

Escarpit, Robert. *Sociology of Literature*. Painesville, The Lake Erie College Press, 1965.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. Vintage Books, 1995.
—. *Penal Theories and Institutions.* Translated by Graham Burchell. New York, Picador, 2019.
—. *Power and Knowledge*. Translated by Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, Kate Soper. Vintage Books, 1980.
—. *The Birth of Biopolitics.* Translated by Graham Burchell. New York, Picador, 2008.
—. *The History of Sexuality.* Translated by Robert Hurley. Vintage Books, 1990.

Funkenstein, Amos. "Collective Memory and Historical Consciousness." *History & Memory,* vol. 1, no. 1, 1989, pp. 5-26.

Fürst, Henrik. "Subordination and Legitimation of Self-Publishing: Shifting the Basis for Evaluation of Cultural Goods." *Cultural Sociology,* vol. 13(4), 2019, pp. 483-502.

Gagné, Peter. *King's Daughters and Founding Mothers: The Filles du Roi, 1663-1673*. 2 vols. Copyright by Peter J. Gagné 2001, Printed in USA

Garcia, Antero. *Critical Foundations in Young Adult Literature.* Brill Academic Pub, 2013.

Genette, Gerard. *Narrative Discourse*. Trans. Jane E Lewin. Cornell University Press, 1980.

Gergen, Mary. “Human/Nature Narratives and Popular Films: Big, Bad, Bold, Beneficent, Bountiful, Beautiful and Bereft.” In: Sugiman, T., Gergen, K.J., Wagner, W., Yamada, Y. (eds) Meaning in Action. Springer, Tokyo, 2008.

Gillis, Candida. “Multiple Voice, Multiple Genres: Fiction for Young Adults.” *The English Journal*, vol. 92, no. 2, Nov 2002, pp. 52-59.

Gould, Virginia. “Bienville’s Brides: Virgins or Prostitutes? 1719-1721.” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*, vol. 59, no. 4, Fall 2018, pp. 398-408.

Griffin, Susan. *Women’s Postmodern Historical Fiction: The Art of Reconstruction.* State University of New York at Stony Brook, PhD Dissertation, 1999.

Grosby, Steven. *Nationalism: A Very Short Introduction (Very Short Introductions).* Kindle ed., Oxford University Press. 2005.

Guist-Desprairies, Florence. *L’imaginaire Collectif.* Toulouse, ERES, 2014.

Halbwachs, Maurice. *On Collective Memory*. Trans. Lewis A Coser. The University of Chicago Press, 1992.

Hall, John. *The Sociology of Literature*. London, Longman Group Limited, 1979.

Hall, Robert A. *Cultural Symbolism in Literature*. Ithaca, Linguistica, 1963.

Hamilton, Peter. *The Founding of Mobile 1702-1718*. Mobile, Commercial Printing Company, 1911.

Harzewski, Stephanie. *Chick Lit and Postfeminism.* University of Virginia Press, 2011.

Heilmann, Ann and Mark Llewellyn. “Hystorical fictions: Women (re)writing and (re)reading history”. *Women: A Cultural Review*, vol. 15, no. 2, July 2004, pp. 137-152.
—. “Editorial: Political Hystories.” *Feminist Review*, No. 85, 2007, pp. 1-7.

Hilton, Mary, and Maria Nikolajeva, editors. *Contemporary Adolescent Literature and Culture: The Emergent Adult.* Routledge, 2012.

Hunt, Lynn. *Eroticism and the Body Politic*. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991.

Hutcheon, Linda. *The Politics of Postmodernism*. New York, Routledge, 2002.

Jameson, Fredric. *Signatures of the Visible*. New York, Routledge, 1990.
—. *The Ancients and the Postmoderns*. London, Verso, 2015.
—. *The Cultural Turn*. New York, Verso, 1998.
—. *The Political Unconscious*. Cornell University Press, 1981.

Karpinski, Eva. “Transversal Alliances: Fantasies of Indigeneity in Suzanne Desrochers’s *Bride of New France*.” *Canada and Beyond: a Journal of Canadian Literary and Cultural XXXX*, vol. 3, no. 1-2, 2013, pp. 181-204.

Kirca, Süheyla. “Popular Culture: From Being an Enemy of the “Feminist Movement” to a Tool for Women’s “Liberation”?”. *Journal of American Culture*, September 1999, pp. 101-107.

Kreis, Wilmont. *The Allards Book One: The New World.* Self-Published. Michigan, 2006.

Ladnier, Randall. *The Brides of La Baleine.* Sarasota, RDL Press, 2017.

Landry, Yves. “Les filles du roi émigrées au Canada au XVIIe siècle, ou un exemple de choix du conjoint en situation de déséquilibre des sexes”. *Histoire, Économie et Société,* vol. 11, no. 2, pp. 197-216.

—. *Orphelines en France pionnières au Canada : Les Filles du roi au xvii^e siècle ; suivi d'un, Répertoir biographique des Filles du roi.* Ottawa, Leméac Éditeur, 1992.

Léger, Natalie. *‘A Tragedy of Success!’: Haiti and the Promise of Revolution*. Cornell University, PhD Dissertation, 2012.

Lemke, Thomas. *Biopolitics: An Advanced Introduction.* New York University Press, 2011.

Létourneau, Jocelyn. *Passer à l’avenir: Histoire, mémoire, identité dans le Québec d’aujourd’hui.* Boréal, 2000.

Levesque, Stéphane, and Jean-Philippe Croteau. “We will continue our struggle for success: French Canadian students, narrative, and historical consciousness.” *Theory & Research in Social Education,* vol. 50:1, pp. 101-124.

Levine, Elana, editor. *Cupcakes, Pinterest, and Ladyporn : Feminized Popular Culture in the Early Twenty-First Century*. University of Illinois Press, 2015.

Loewenberg, Peter. *Fantasy and Reality in History*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995.

Lucács, Georg. *The Historical Novel.* Translated by Hannah and Stanley Mitchell, University of Nebraska Press, 1983.

Lyotard, Jean-Francois. *La Condition Postmoderne*. Paris, Les Editions de Minuit, 1979.

—. *La Phenomenologie*. Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1954.

Marshall, Bill. *Quebec National Cinema*. McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001.

Martin, Robert K, and Eric Savoy, editors. *American Gothic: New Interventions in a National Narrative*. University of Iowa Press, 1998.

Maza, Sarah. "Stories in History: Cultural Narratives in Recent Works in European History." *The American Historical Review* 101.5 (1996): 1493-1515.

McCalman, Iain and Paul Pickering, editors. *Historical Reenactment: From Realism to the Affective Turn*. New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

McRobbie, Angela. *The Aftermath of Feminism: gender, culture, and social change.* London, Sage Publications, 2009.
—. *The Uses of Cultural Studies.* London, Sage Publications, 2005.

Mossman, Carol A. *Politics and narratives of birth.* Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Murphy, Michael. *Fear Dat: New Orleans: A Guide to the Voodoo, Vampires, Graveyards & Ghosts of the Crescent City*. New York, Countryman Press, 2015.

National Network to End Domestic Violence "Each Day, Three Women Die because of Domestic Violence." Nnedv.org. Accessed 16 March 2023.

Negra, Diane and Yvonne Tasker, editors. *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture.* Duke University Press, 2007.

Noel, Jan. *Along a River: The First French-Canadian Women.* University of Toronto Press, 2013.

Novin, Sheida and Daphna Oyserman. "Honor as Cultural Mindset: Activated Honor Mindset Affects Subsequent Judgment and Attention in Mindset-Congruent Ways." *Frontiers in Psychology,* December 2016, pp. 1-14.

Nye Jr., Joseph S. *The Paradox of American Power.* New York, Oxford University Press, 2002.

O'Connor, John. *Teaching History with Film and Television*. Washington D.C., American Historical Association, 1987.

O'Leary, Anne. "Self-publishing: say goodbye to vanity and come in from the cold." *Books Ireland*, No. 365, February 2016, pp. 18-19.

O'Malley, Seamus. *Making History New*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015.

O'Reilly, Andrea, editor. *Maternal Theory: Essential Readings.* Toronto, Demeter Press, 2007.

Orgad, Shani & Gill, Rosalind. *Confidence Culture.* Durham, Duke University Press, 2022.

Ostrov Weisser, Susan. *The Glass Slipper.* Rutgers University Press, 2013.

Overstreet, Andrea Wilson. *Not Your Mother's Vampire: Vampires in Young Adult Fiction.* Maryland, Scarecrow Press, 2006.

Parry, Benita. *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique*. London, Routledge, 2004.

Pelletier, Rose Lewis. *"Filles du roi et Filles de la cassette" L'immigration feminine au Canada (1663-1763) et en Basse-Louisiane (1710-1730)*. 2017. Université de Sherbrooke, MA Thesis.

Plinkington, Amy. *Casket Girls.* Self-published, Kindle ed., 2016.

Podnieks, Elizabeth, and Andrea O'Reilly, editors. *Textual Mothers/Maternal Texts: Motherhood in Contemporary Women's Literatures.* Wilfred Laurier Press, 2010.

Pressley-Sanon, Toni. "One Plus One Equals Three: *Marasa* Consciousness, the *Lwa*, and Three Stories" *Research in African Literatures,* vol. 44, no. 3, Fall 2013, pp. 118-137.

Prévost, Abbé. *Manon Lescaut*. Flammarion Edition, 2012.

Quiroz, Pamela A. *Personal Advertising and Modern Romance*. Jefferson, McFarland & Company, Inc, 2022.

Raoul, Valerie. "Women and Diaries: Gender and Genre." *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal,* Vol. 22, No. 3 (Summer 1989), pp. 57-65.

Radway, Janice. *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature.* Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1984.

Regis, Pamela. *A Natural History of the Romance Novel.* University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007.

Renan, Ernest. "Qu'est-ce qu'une nation ?" Lecture, 11 March 1882, Sorbonne.

Rice, Anne. *The Vampire Chronicles Collection: Volume One.* Kindle ed., Ballantine Books, 1976, 1985, 1988.

Rich, Adrienne. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. Kindle ed., W. W. Norton & Company, 1986.

Ricoeur, Paul. *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2004.

Rigney, Ann. *The Rhetoric of Historical Representation*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Roach, Catherine. *Happily Ever After: The Romance Story in Popular Culture.* Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2016.

—. *Mother/Nature: Popular Culture and Environmental Ethics.* Indiana University Press, 2003.

Rodale, Maya. *Dangerous Books for Girls: The Bad Reputation of Romance Novels Explained.* Self-published, Kindle edition, 2023.

Ross, Loretta J., and Rickie Solinger. *Reproductive Justice: An Introduction.* University of California Press, 2017.

Rottenberg, Catherine. *The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism.* Kindle ed., Oxford University Press, 2018.

Runyan, Aimie K. *Daughters of the King and Founders of a Nation: Les filles du roi in New France.* University of North Texas, Masters Thesis, 2010.
—. *Duty to the Crown.* New York, Kensington Books, 2016.

Said, Edward. *Beginnings: intention and method.* Columbia University Press, 1985.

Shields, David. *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto.* New York, Vintage Books. 2011.

Sommers, Tamler. *Why Honor Matters.* New York, Basic Books, 2018.

Spear, Jennifer. *Race, sex, and social order in early New Orleans*. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009.

Cathedral-Basilica of Saint Louis King of France. St. Louis Cathedral, 2023, https://www.stlouiscathedral.org/. Accessed Summer 2023

Smith, Michelle J., and Kristine Moruzi. "Vampires and Witches Go to School: Contemporary Young Adult Fiction, Gender, and the Gothic." *Children's Literature in Education*, vol. 49, 2018, pp. 6-18.

Staub, Susan (editor). *The Literary Mother: Essays on Representations of Maternity and Child Care.* North Carolina, McFarland & Company, Inc., 2007.

Steger, Manfred B. & Roy, Ravi K. *Neoliberalism: A Very Short Introduction.* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2021.

Stern, Jerome. "Highbrow Taste as Popular Culture." *Studies in Popular Culture*, vol. 1, no. 1, Winter 1977, pp. 1-6.

Taylor, Troy. *Haunted New Orleans: History & Hauntings of the Crescent City.* Charleston, Haunted America, 2010.

Thurer, Shari L. *The Myths of Motherhood: How Culture Reinvents the Good Mother*. Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1994.

Thurston, Carol, "Popular Historical Romances: Agent for Social Change? An Exploration of Methodologies." *Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 19, no. 1, Summer 1985, pp. 35-45.

Tolliver, Julie-Françoise. *The Quebec Connection: A Poetics of Solidarity in Global Francophone Literatures.* University of Virginia Press, 2020.

Tosh, John. *Why History Matters*. New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

Trépanier, Cécyle. "The Cajunization of French Louisiana: Forging a Regional Identity." *The Geographical Journal*, vol. 157, no. 2, July 1991, pp. 161-171.

Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History.* Boston, Beacon Press, 1995.

Tuttle, Leslie. *Conceiving the Old Régime: Pronatalism and the Politics of Reproduction in Early Modern France.* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010.

Vergès, Françoise. *Un féminisme decolonial.* Paris, La Fabrique éditions, 2019.

Wailoo, Keith, Karen M. O'Neill, Jeffrey Dowd, and Roland Anglin, editors. *Katrina's Imprint: Race and Vulnerability in America*. Rutgers University Press, 2010.

Wallace, Diana. *The Woman's Historical Novel: British Women Writers, 1900-2000.* New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

White, Hayden. *Figural Realism*. Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999.
—. *Metahistory: the Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe*. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973.
—. *The Content of the Form*. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987.
—. *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978.

Wilde, Oscar. *The Rise of Historical Criticism*. Folcroft, The Folcroft Press, Inc., 1969.

Wilder, Eric. *New Orleans Dangerous.* Edmond, Gondwana Press, 2019.

Woolf, Daniel. *The Social Circulation of the Past*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003.

Zug, Marcia. *Buying a Bride: An Engaging History of Mail-Order Matches.* New York University Press, 2016.